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*Source: "American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times" by Douglas Gilbert (published by Whitteley House); I. C. S. records.

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*The crooks rushed on deck,
guns drawn.*

CHAPTER I

CORPORAL DICK MCKAY, fresh from Tarawa via a Marine hospital, stepped off the train and surveyed what he could of the strange city to which he had come. It was a centrally located town of about one hundred thousand souls, no dirtier, no cleaner than any other busy industrial city. It had its slums, its modest bungalows with

their white fences, and its imposing houses located in the Locust Hill District.

Nobody paid much attention to Marine Corporal McKay. A few people glanced at his ribbons, but very few knew what they meant. Men of the armed services were no novelty to this town.

Dick McKay had a mission to perform. It was his sole reason for coming here. There were two people in the town he had

By Norman A. Daniels

★ ★ ★

Amid the screaming bullets of Tarawa a dying pal gave Marine Dick McKay a message for his home-town D.A. Yet all McKay's hot-lead learning was needed when he hit the quiet burg. For organized murder was waiting to rub out the dispatch and make McKay homesick for the Pacific hell.

★ ★ ★

McKay gave a running jump and cleared the rail.



to see. Two people for whom he bore a message from the dead. From Alex Garrick, the seemingly underfed, eternally seasick, hell-roaring, fighting man who'd gone down with the first attacking wave of Marines who stormed Tarawa.

McKay didn't like to think about it.

He'd had many friends in that detail of Marines, and now his friends were very limited. Most of them had died. The doctors on the hospital ship never had figured why Corporal McKay hadn't died, too. By all rules of medicine he should have.

McKay asked a pedestrian directions on how to reach Machine Street, and got a slight uplift of eyebrows before the man gave him the necessary directions. McKay walked. A Marine, just mustered out of the service for medical reasons, hasn't too much money.

He knew the significance of the uplifted eyebrows when he reached Machine Street. It had been apparently named for the factories that toiled, sweated and billowed smoke all around the area. The house he wanted was a six-family tenement in need of paint and repairs. A couple of babies, unattended in ramshackle carriages, squawked their opinion of their surroundings.

Inside the so-called foyer, Corporal McKay found some rusty mail boxes. The only one of the six which wasn't rusty carried the name, *P. Garrick*. That was it—Alex Garrick's family.

McKay squared his shoulders, and winced as one of his wound scars protested slightly. He didn't feel the twinge of pain, except subconsciously, for what he had to do was more painful. He walked up the stairs, located the right tenement, and tapped on the door.

It opened. The girl who looked curiously at him seemed out of place in this section, like a breath of spring time in the middle of winter. She had soft brown hair and gray eyes. Her face was round and smooth. The cheap little dress she wore seemed to take on an allure just because she wore it.

"I—I thought at first you were—my brother," she said.

McKay said, "That's why I came—about Alex Garrick. I want to see his sister Peggy."

"Why, that's me," she said. "They didn't make a mistake. Alex isn't alive?"

"No," McKay said slowly, "No, he isn't alive. You see, Alex and I were friends. We fought side by side until he—got it."

"Come in," Peggy said, and her eyes were misty. "I—I guess I'm not much of a hostess. I—loved Alex very much even if he wasn't, well, quite what he should have been. Our mother and father died before the war. I brought up Alex and Edwin. He's my other brother. Younger than Alex was."

MCKAY sat down in a spotlessly clean living room. He crossed his legs and decided the best thing to do was blurt

it all out. Get it over without prolonging the agony.

"Alex was killed," he said. "He attacked a Jap machine-gun nest, knowing very well that whoever did it wouldn't come back. But he went in and put that nest out of business. I found him—later on. He talked to me before the stretchers came. He made me promise to deliver two messages. One to you, his sister. One to a man named George Cunningham."

"To you, Alex said he was very sorry for everything, that he hoped what happened would help to repay. I don't know what he meant. Alex was a good guy—my pal."

Peggy didn't cry. She just sat there, stony faced.

"Alex did repay," she said slowly. "I guess nobody can say he didn't. You see, Alex used to be a crook. A petty thief. He was never arrested, but I couldn't do a thing with him. I'd almost given up when he got a job—with this George Cunningham—an attorney. He seemed to straighten out, but I was afraid—until the Japs attacked Pearl Harbor. He enlisted the day after. I was proud of him. I still am."

McKay stirred uneasily. "Well, I guess that's all, Miss Garrick. That's what Alex wanted me to say to you. Now I've got to see this George Cunningham."

Peggy Garrick mustered a smile. "Corporal—I don't know your name. We can find out where this man lives and I'll drive you over. I have a car of sorts."

"Thanks. My name is Dick McKay. If you have a telephone book, we might find him."

There was no phone in the house, but there was an old city directory which revealed the fact that George Cunningham was an attorney, who lived in the exclusive Locust Hill area, close by a huge lake.

"Corporal," Peggy said, "what was the message Alex sent to this man Cunningham? Naturally, I'm interested. Cunningham was trying to make Alex go straight."

McKay smiled. "Sorry, I can't even tell it to you. Alex made me swear I wouldn't. It's a funny message. Doesn't make sense to me, but I suppose Cunningham will know."

They were getting ready to leave when Edwin Garrick came in. He was a pasty-faced, sullen-looking young man of about nineteen. He stared at McKay, listened to

the story of his hero brother, and bit his lower lip as McKay told it.

"I'll get the car, sis," he told Peggy. "Yes, sir, we've got to help out any pal of Alex's. I'll meet you in front of the house."

He hurried away. Peggy sighed. "He's like Alex. There are hundreds of jobs, yet he prefers hanging around poolrooms. I work on a night shift, so I can't keep track of him. Ready, Corporal McKay?"

McKay took her arm as they descended the steep steps. He found himself liking Peggy Garrick more and more. There wasn't a complaint out of her for all the trouble she lived with. He liked the way she took the story of her brother's death, too. Bravely. He held her arm a little tighter.

AN OLD Chevie was out front. Ed Garrick had disappeared, however. Peggy got behind the wheel.

Very soon they were rolling over a smooth highway leading to this exclusive suburban section. They were perhaps two or three miles from their destination, when the motor coughed and finally died. It didn't take McKay long to find out they were out of gasoline.

"Why, that's odd," Peggy said. "I put in a whole month's ration only yesterday. Edwin must have taken the car out last night. He hasn't a license. I'm going to be firm about this. But what'll we do now?"

McKay chuckled. "There was a gas station half a mile back. It so happens I've got a book of rationing coupons which were given to me when I was mustered out. I asked for them, because I've got a car back home. I'll get enough to see us through."

McKay hiked back to the gas station, got a can of fuel, and walked back to the car. He was still amazed at the utter lack of traffic, but he'd been abroad since right after the war began. There were a lot of things he had to learn.

Soon the car was rolling along again. Peggy finally turned into an imposing archway toward a large house. Directly behind it was the big lake. One of the largest in the state. There were lights on in the house. It had grown dark already.

"I'll wait for you," Peggy said. "If Alex didn't want me to hear the message you have for Mr. Cunningham, I'd better

not intrude. Alex worked here as a gardener and handy man. I think he liked it."

McKay nodded, promised he'd soon come out. Then he walked up the porch steps and rang the bell. He heard chimes ring out somewhere deep in the big house. He waited, but no one came to answer the door.

McKay raised himself on tiptoe to peer through the small window set high in the door. Some of his weight rested on the door. There was a click. The door had been loosely closed; now it swung open slowly, as if silently inviting him to enter.

McKay hesitated. He wanted to see this man Cunningham, dispose of his business, and start for home. Perhaps he hadn't heard the chimes or was taking a bath or something. McKay stepped into the luxuriously furnished reception hall.

He called out Cunningham's name and received no answer. He frowned, walked a little further down the hall, then stopped abruptly. His nostrils twitched. There was a familiar, ghastly smell here. He'd learned to recognize it on various Pacific islands. It was the odor of fresh blood. Human blood!

McKay began moving fast, inspecting the rooms. The third one was a study. Sprawled in the middle of the rug was a man who was most certainly dead. His throat had been slit from ear to ear. The room was in confusion, as if the victim had put up a battle.

McKay didn't wince at the gory sight. He was used to things like this. He felt vainly for a pulse and discovered the body was very warm. The man had been dead only a short time. The killer might be still within the house. McKay walked over to a desk, picked up a heavy paperweight and felt a little better with this weapon in his hand.

He went to the front door, intending to warn Peggy against entering. He was slightly amazed to find that neither she nor the Chevie was there any longer. He didn't have time to speculate on reasons for this. There was a murder to report. He headed for the telephone.

Twenty minutes later, the house was filled with policemen, reporters, men from the mortuary, and all those whose business it is to hover about the newly dead. A tall, blond detective lieutenant named

Otis was in command. He took McKay into an empty room.

"Okay, Marine," he said, "you told your story and I'm not doubting it in the least. Now—what was this message your dead pal sent to Cunningham?"

McKay hesitated. "I don't know what to do, Lieutenant. Alex made me swear I wouldn't tell anyone else no matter what happened. I—I suppose I should tell. Look. You get the District Attorney down here. If he advises me to tell, I will."

Lieutenant Otis narrowed his eyes slightly. "You're so darned naïve, Corporal, that I almost wonder if it isn't an act. George Cunningham was the D. A. He's been for almost a year. That's why his murder has aroused so much excitement. Now you'd better tell me that message. It will save you an awful lot of trouble."

McKay whistled softly. "I guess you're right, sir. Okay, here it is. Three words and they don't make the slightest sense to me. They are 'Reef Your Sails.'"

CHAPTER II

LIEUTENANT OTIS digested the odd statement for a moment. Then he looked squarely at McKay.

"This fellow Garrick, who died on Tarawa, may have been one swell Marine. He gave his life for his country, and I respect him for it, but—Alex Garrick was a hoodlum when he lived here. A petty crook, involved with all the criminals of our city. He was, bluntly, no darned good."

"Why, you . . ." McKay started to rise.

"Take it easy," Otis warned. "I talked of him in the past tense. What he did on Tarawa wiped out anything we hold against him. I'm only telling you this, because if Garrick had a message for Cunningham, it meant something. Cunningham took young Garrick under his wing, trying to put him straight. He wasn't the D. A. then. Perhaps they had a little deal. Maybe Garrick was remorseful and wanted to spill all he knew."

"These three words might be part of a code. Yes, maybe that's it. Cunningham has a big sailing boat right here on the lake. It's tied up at his private dock. Perhaps we'll find the answer to things aboard that ship."

"Just talk about Alex Garrick as if he

was a straight guy," McKay warned. "I saw him die. I know what he was. Otherwise, this whole business is right in your lap. I want to go home. Haven't been there in nearly three years. I've got to look for a job. My part in this war is over. My active part, that is. I've seen some pretty horrible stuff. It keeps me awake nights, thinking of it. I want to forget. What happened right here isn't helping me."

Otis arose. "You'll have to stick around town a few days, McKay. If you're broke, I'll see your expenses are paid. Just be reasonable and don't make us hold you as a material witness. Keep your eyes open, too. There may be certain parties who'd like to know about that code message."

"What do you mean, certain parties?" McKay asked.

Otis stepped closer to him. "Frankly, this town is shot through with crooks. We've tried to clean them up for a long time, but they've got men planted in strategic posts. I hoped that maybe Garrick knew who they were and was tipping us off. He could have known them. Anyway, take my advice and watch yourself. Call Headquarters when you're established, and let me know where you're at."

McKay nodded. A police car drove him to town. He checked in at a hotel, went to his room, and threw himself across the bed. This was one heck of a homecoming! To run full tilt into murder. He thought about Peggy Garrick. Why had she disappeared? Then McKay sat erect, his features growing sterner.

Peggy knew he was about to deliver a message to the D. A. She could have warned someone, who got to Cunningham first, so that Alex Garrick's dying message would be shared only by two dead men. The car had run out of gas almost too conveniently. The delay had given the murderers time to get to Cunningham first. McKay felt that Peggy Garrick had a great deal to explain.

His telephone rang, startling him. He hoped it would be Peggy. It was only the desk clerk announcing the fact that two men wanted to see him at once. They were, the clerk claimed, members of a civic committee who wanted a favor of McKay. He had them sent up.

They were well-dressed men, about forty years old. One presented his card

disclosing that his name was Theodore Packer and that he was connected with a radio station.

"Here is what we want of you," Packer smiled. "The death in action of Alex Garrick is the first casualty our city has suffered. The first fatal one, that is. We believe the city should hear how he died, the whole heroic story. Who can tell it better than someone who was there on Tarawa? It's your patriotic duty to help us, Corporal."

"Why not?" McKay shrugged. "It might do some good. Make a few people buy more war bonds. Sure, I'll do it. When?"

"The whole thing is red hot," Packer explained. "What with the murder of our district attorney, and your being there just after it happened, makes you real news. We've a local broadcast going on in two hours. We can take you to the studio right now for rehearsal. The time element, you know. By ten-thirty we'll have you back here. Incidentally, it's worth fifty dollars."

"Keep your dough," McKay said. "I'm ready now."

They waited for him to clean up, and soon he was being whisked downtown in a sedan. It came to a stop outside what seemed to be a pretty old building for a radio station. Packer apologized.

"Our main studios are being revamped completely. We're using this building for a few weeks. Come along, Corporal."

Any suspicions which McKay might have entertained were blasted when he saw a large white card lettered with red paint announcing this was the entrance to the temporary studios of the broadcasting company. He followed Packer up a flight of stairs to the second floor. The other man, so far very silent, was behind him.

PACKER opened a door and walked through. So did McKay, only to find himself in a large room, barren of furniture or anything else. As he stopped, suspicion rising anew within him, the man behind thrust a gun muzzle into the small of McKay's spine.

Packer grinned at him. The room was illuminated with one electric light, a small table lamp set on a box in the far corner of the room. Packer had lost his suave manner. He was looking mighty grim, almost

like some of those Japs just before a death charge.

"Be sensible, McKay," Packer said. "You can make a lot of money by talking. We want young Garrick's message to the D. A. We want it badly enough to pay plenty or shell out a lot of agony to you. Why suffer? Come on, what did Garrick want you to tell the D. A.?"

McKay took a long breath. He was trapped. Either of these men were ready to shoot him down, but that didn't make any difference.

"Listen, you two," he snapped. "Alex Garrick gave up his life for his country, but he didn't die for a couple of rats like you. Once, way back there, the Japs held me prisoner for half an hour. They wanted to know things I could tell them. They tried to make me talk. Do you believe even rats like you could do more to me than those Japs did? They found out nothing from me."

Packer shrugged. "We're desperate, McKay, otherwise we wouldn't pick on a hero. Garrick knew too much. He told us he might squawk if we didn't stop certain interests. Well, we can't stop. His message to the D. A. is dangerous to us. We've got to know it. Yes, we can make you talk, because we've a little ace in the hole. First, however, we'll bat you around plenty. Don't be a stupid idiot. Talk!"

McKay told them where to go.

Instantly the man behind him used his pistol butt. McKay slumped to one knee. Blood ran down the back of his neck. Rage took possession of him. He wished then he had a rifle, bayonet equipped. He knew how to use one of those babies. Or a grenade. He knew them, too.

McKay threw himself forward in an attempt to grab Packer. Instead, the crook kicked out. His toe hit McKay full in the face. He tasted blood this time, and it infuriated him. All he could think of was the fact that Alex Garrick had given up his life cheerfully for two such as these.

McKay got in one healthy wallop. It hit Packer squarely on the nose and blood spurted. Then the other, silent man, began using a blackjack. McKay finally folded up. He was helpless against a thing like this.

Someone threw water in his face. He sat up, dizzy and sick. He looked around, and gradually his eyes became accustomed to the near-gloom of the place. He

saw someone else had entered this huge room. It was Peggy Garrick.

She was seated in a chair right beside the table lamp on that old box. Her face was perfectly white. Beside her stood the silent member of the murderous duo. He held a gun pointed directly at Peggy's ear. Packer came into view. He must have been standing behind McKay.

Packer said, "Meet our ace in the hole, Corporal. Remember, you've made us do this. Now, in two minutes you will have given us Garrick's message, or that very charming girl is going to have her head blown off. What do you think of it, Corporal?"

McKay said flatly, "It's a typical Jap trick. Suppose I tell you this message. How do you know it's the truth? How do I know you won't kill that girl anyway—and me, too?"

"Now listen," Packer protested, "we're not as bad as that. Believe me, we'll get out of here fast—we'll learn if what you say is a lie. Spill it, Corporal. Don't continue to be a fool."

McKay weighed his chances and found the balance tipped about a million to one against him. He couldn't sit there and see Peggy murdered. After all, this business concerned a town he had nothing to do with. Lieutenant Otis already knew the message, and could probably act on it as quickly as these men.

"You win," McKay groaned. "Let Peggy go. Let me see her leaving this place from one of the windows. Ten minutes after that, I'll talk."

"Right," Packer agreed, and McKay was surprised that he did. "We can pick up the girl again any time. Pudge, take her out of here. McKay, come over to this window and watch her leave. She won't even be followed."

McKay looked for a long moment at Peggy. As she arose and walked with the skinny man, oddly named Pudge, Peggy never glanced his way. Her face was just as pale as when the gun was pointed at her ear. They vanished through the door.

A couple of minutes later, McKay saw them walk across the street. There Pudge left her. Peggy walked away, never looking back, unhurried and apparently quite calm. McKay's suspicions about her rose another notch.

"Well?" Packer asked hopefully. "We kept our end of the bargain."

"WILL you tell me something first?" McKay wanted to know. "Just to get things straight in my own mind. Alex Garrick was some kind of a crook until he joined the Marines. As he died, he figured it would help if he sent the D. A. a message to blast certain criminal interests in this city right off the map. Am I right?"

"It's none of your business," Packer frowned darkly. "I only want that message, and I intend to get it."

McKay shrugged and walked toward the chair in which Peggy had been seated. He sensed that these men couldn't afford to let him live once he told the truth. This was his business now. He owed that much to Alex—to see that his hopes came true.

The police, apparently, were handicapped. McKay wasn't, if he could get out of this present predicament. He didn't know the meaning of Garrick's strange message. Neither did the cops. Maybe the crooks did and would act on it. If so, if he was free, too, then he might be able to do what Garrick wanted. Clean up this unholy mess. McKay decided to tell that message.

Pudge was back, standing just one side, his gun dangling limply. Packer was getting impatient. McKay knew they wouldn't wait much longer.

"The message," he said, "is this: 'Reef Your Sails.'"

"He's nuts if he thinks we believe that," Pudge spoke for the first time.

"No, he isn't," Packer seemed excited. "Garrick's only way out was to hide a letter telling all he knew. Naming names and all that. Cunningham has a sailing boat. Garrick may have concealed that letter in such a position on the boat that when the sails are reefed, the note will be exposed. I think McKay told the truth. I think we can take a chance, Pudge. Go ahead. Finish it up."

Pudge smiled, as his gun started to come up. But McKay had selected this spot for a reason. His right arm flew out and hit the table lamp. The room was plunged into jet darkness. McKay was on his feet instantly. He'd made his plans well.

He darted between the two men, reached the middle of the spacious floor and stood there, rigid and immobile. He didn't even breathe. He was suddenly back on Guadalcanal and Tarawa with Japs quietly moving about, trying to find

him. So long as he made no sound and had an ally in the blackness, he was safe. When one of them came close enough—McKay missed his bayonet more than ever.

Packer and Pudge knew nothing of this type of fighting. They thought they were quiet in moving about. To McKay, they sounded like a pair of blundering fools, although he still retained considerable respect for Pudge's gun. The man looked as if he not only knew how to use it, but would like to as well.

Someone came closer. McKay didn't move a hair. The men eased by, no more than two feet to McKay's left. He could have grabbed them, but that wouldn't help. He knew, sooner or later, that they'd get the jitters. Braver men than they ever hoped to be had reacted that way.

Pudge cracked first. "Packer, where are you? I think he's gone. He slipped out the back. Light a match."

"No," Packer snapped from across the room. "That guy is a killer. He knows how it's done. I heard what he did to those Japs. He's here somewhere, but I can't see him or hear him. Let's get out of here. We learned what we came for."

Pudge said nothing, but by the sigh he heaved, it was quite apparent he was in complete accord. McKay smiled tightly. His experience fighting the Japs was showing dividends. When the two men left, they clattered down the steps in a terrific hurry.

CHAPTER III

MCKAY moved slowly, warily. He wasn't falling into any trap. He located a rear exit, started down the stairs, and paused. Packer was a smart guy. He'd not be likely to permit McKay to get away with this. McKay stealthily climbed back up the steps.

He looked for other exits, and discovered one leading to the third floor. That was equally abandoned. He did, however, find a ladder to the roof and reached this quickly. Flat on his stomach, he crawled toward the edge of the roof. Pudge was down there, standing in a darkened doorway, waiting.

McKay crawled to the rear. Packer was dimly visible leaning against a refuse bin, covering the rear exit. McKay drew back. He noticed that the building to the left was of equal height, the alley between

them only a matter of six or seven feet wide. He removed his shoes, laced them together and slung them around his neck.

Then he slowly approached the left side of the roof, gave a running jump, and cleared the alley easily. It was a simple jump for a Marine, trained to take advantage of much greater leaps than this when they meant safety.

He was sure neither crook realized he'd made the leap. McKay crept down the steps to the front door, put on his shoes again, and got ready to make his way clear. He peered through the door and shrugged. The car in which they'd brought him here was pulling away. Apparently the pair had given up.

McKay was careful though. He knew all about ruses. The Japs had pulled one something like this once. A few boys had fallen for the trap—and the Jap bullets. McKay intended to find Lieutenant Otis first, but he changed his mind. He had to know if Peggy Garrick was involved. He owed Alex any protection he might offer her.

A taxi took him to her home, but no one answered his knock. McKay went back to the cab which he'd kept waiting, and had himself driven to Police Headquarters. Luck was against him. Lieutenant Otis was out on business.

"Say," the desk sergeant looked him over, "you must be Corporal McKay. Lorimer and the inspector want to see you."

"Who is Lorimer?" McKay asked.

"Cunningham's former partner and a candidate for Cunningham's job. Walk down that corridor until you come to an office marked Chief Inspector. Lorimer is in there, helping to try to make head or tail of Cunningham's murder. Better go, son. The inspector issued an order to have you picked up ten minutes ago."

"He didn't have to do that," McKay said. "I'll see him."

He reached the door, knocked and opened it. Two detectives stared at him curiously. Lorimer occupied a big chair. He was thirty-eight or thereabouts. He was carefully dressed, had a pretty waxed mustache. McKay didn't like him. The inspector was gray-haired, grizzled and stern-eyed.

"So," Lorimer snapped, "you're McKay. Where have you been? Why didn't you contact Headquarters as Lieutenant

Otis ordered you to? Don't Marines know how to take orders?"

"Get up and ask me that again," McKay said very, very softly.

Lorimer didn't accept the invitation. He leaned back in his chair and eyed McKay for a moment. McKay dropped his pugnacity. It wouldn't get him anywhere. He wanted to go home.

"It so happened," he explained, "that before I could call Otis, two crooks came to see me. They duped me nicely, too, got me into a building at 1151 Blake Street, on the second floor. They pounded me around plenty. Those lumps on my face aren't mosquito bites."

Lorimer turned to one of the detectives. "Why not take a detail and go to that address? See what you can find."

"Look," McKay said, "can I suggest something? Those crooks made me repeat the message I was to deliver to Cunningham. I had to do it or a girl named Peggy Garrick, Alex's sister, would have been murdered."

"Nice," Lorimer snarled. "Very nice. Where's your nerve, Corporal? I didn't think a Marine would let himself be bested."

McKay's right hand was slowly folding into a fist. "For myself, I could take it, but I couldn't stand there and let them kill that girl. Sure, I talked. I'm used to fighting rats. Maybe these crooks fall into the same class with Japs, I wouldn't know about that; but at least when you're fighting Japs, you don't mistake them for anything else."

"Ah, yes," Lorimer smiled a little. The inspector took a hand then, and ordered the other detective to bring in Peggy Garrick. He told McKay to sit down, turned back to the desk, and worked with some papers.

HALF an hour went by. Twice, McKay started to tell the inspector he'd better get somebody over to the lake before the crooks found what they were after, but the inspector waved him to silence and showed considerable irritation over McKay's interruptions.

One detective returned looking highly puzzled. "This sounds funny," he reported, "but I went to the address the Marine gave us. It's a pool hall, going full blast with plenty of tables and lots of guys around. There's no vacant building any place near that number."

McKay started to protest, but Peggy Garrick was led in. She didn't look at McKay.

Lorimer seemed to appreciate her loveliness for he was being very chivalrous about seating her and making her comfortable. His voice was friendly and pleasant when he talked to her. She glanced at McKay.

"I don't know what he means," she said. "I drove him to Mr. Cunningham's house and I haven't seen him since. I'm very certain no crooks held me prisoner or pointed a gun at my head."

McKay arose. He could sense this whole business as a trap. Maybe the lot of them were crooks, including Peggy. He hated to think this about her, but she was so obviously lying. He knew they'd take no action against the two crooks who'd kidnapped him. It was even likely that Lorimer intended to stall long enough so those crooks could reach Cunningham's sailboat and find what Alex Garrick had hidden there. It was time for McKay to take his own form of action.

He pretended to be very nervous and agitated. He got up and sidled toward the middle of the room. Suddenly he turned and made a dive for the door. He got through it and was streaking along the corridor. The desk sergeant jumped up, but he saw only a forest green uniform go scoting past. Lorimer and the detectives pounded in hot pursuit, but they were chasing a man who knew all the tricks.

Peggy Garrick walked through the main office of headquarters alone. Her eyes were misty, her steps a trifle unsteady. Nobody paid any attention to her.

Lorimer was yelling orders. "Get that corporal. He's out of his mind. Telling us wild stories. Maybe he even killed Cunningham. Young Garrick hated him. Maybe he got McKay sore, too, and McKay killed him. Some of those shell-shocked soldiers do funny things. Bring him back. Alive if you can, but remember he may be highly dangerous."

The inspector began giving quiet orders. He seemed unimpressed by Lorimer's burst of activity. Reaching the big lake behind Cunningham's house was going to be difficult, McKay realized. It would be like running a gauntlet. Every cop in uniform would be looking for him and there would be unrecognizable detectives on his trail. Yet he had to reach

that lake before the crooks could take action.

He used two taxis to begin the trip. He had to leap from the second cab, however, when its radio began broadcasting an urgent request to spot and hold a Marine corporal wanted on suspicion of murder. They were even going that far.

McKay scooted down an alley and wished he was in mufti. The uniform was a dead giveaway. Still, there was nothing he could do about it now. By keeping off busy streets and lurking close to building shadows, he was able to leave the metropolitan area without detection. Then he set out on the fairly long hike toward George Cunningham's house and sailing vessel.

SOME of the wounds ached by this time. McKay tried to forget them by thinking of Peggy Garrick and why she had been on his side one moment and brazenly lying the next. He hadn't dreamed that ghastly sequence in the vacant building. There'd been no pool-room there, not even a trace of one. He began wondering if the forces he worked against weren't trying to prove him afflicted with insanity.

McKay growled at the problem this mess presented. To make matters worse none of it was his business. He'd merely tried to do a favor for a dying pal. McKay thought of Alex Garrick, and knew now why young Garrick had been such a strange person when he first joined McKay's unit. He'd been almost sullen, rarely taking part in any sports beyond poker and dice. Then he played for all it was worth. More often than not the boys had suspected him of pulling an ace out of his sleeve.

To learn now that Garrick had previously been a crook, solved a lot of the mystery about him. McKay recalled watching the man develop into a real warrior with principles and an intense loyalty. How Garrick had often started to confide in him, then changed his mind abruptly.

He'd only talked as he lay dying, with four Jap bullets through him. Then he'd honestly seen the true light of things and tried to atone for his past sins. It began to look as though Garrick's gesture on behalf of the law was going to fail. Whatever he'd left for Cunningham

would probably be in the hands of the crooks by now.

It was a long, tedious trek to the lake. McKay used up a good two and a half hours in covering the distance. Being unfamiliar with the locale he got lost twice. But now, as he gazed down at the shimmering surface of the water in faint moonlight, he began moving with extreme caution.

He spotted the boat shortly afterwards. Certainly it must be Cunningham's because it was the only sailing vessel in sight. A big ship that really belonged on salt water. She had two sails, a sleek hull, and made a fascinating appearance. McKay had to get aboard her somehow. He'd soon know whether or not the crooks had beat him to it.

Slipping closer to the tiny dock, he used jungle-trained ears again. He could hear someone padding around on the deck, then rough oaths of men afflicted by frustration. McKay grinned. That meant they hadn't found what they were looking for.

He stripped down to his shorts, slid quietly into the water, and waded part of the way to the ship's stern. She was prow in toward shore. He hit deeper water and swam noiselessly, another little feature he'd been taught by rough experience.

He reached the anchor chain, crawled up it, heedless of the pain caused by stretching his muscles and body too much, and took a quick look across the deck. There were three or four men well forward, beyond the cabin and the companionway leading to the sleeping quarters below decks.

CHAPTER IV

THE Marine scurried across the deck. In bare feet he made no sound and was fast enough to practically flit from one shadow to the next. He went down the companionway ladder, put on the brake as he passed the three neat cabins, then resumed his speed. McKay was heading for a small hold. Now nothing more than a bulkhead door was in his way.

He spent about twenty minutes in the hold, came out grinning broadly, then he grew serious. The hardest part was going to consist of getting off this boat.

Just before he risked a quick peek from the companionway, he heard a portion of

canvas rip beneath the sharp blade of a knife. A man's voice reached him. It was Packer's.

"That Marine was lying," he grumbled. "We've all but carved the sails apart. There's nothing concealed here. We tried reefing 'em and nothing happened either. I say let's go below and rip the cabins apart. Garrick may have been just giving Cunningham a vague tip to confuse anyone else who happened to get the message. That confession and list of names may be hidden anywhere on the boat."

"I'm staying on deck," Pudge's voice answered. "I don't think the Marine lied, but I wish we still had him on ice. He made me sweat plenty in the dark back at the pool hall. I'd like to make him pay for that. I was never so doggone scared. Figured maybe he had a knife and would stick me like he done those Japs."

"Won't you ever stop being afraid of a knife?" Packer said irritably. "Guns don't scare you half as much. Hey, Monk, come below with me. If Pudge wants to stay up there and search, it's okay. He might find something. We'll tear the downstairs apart."

Packer and a hefty man headed toward the companionway. McKay hurriedly darted into the first cabin, closed the door and stood behind it. If they entered, he might be able to get clear before they turned around or knew of his presence.

It would be better, he realized, if he had a safer spot to hide. There was a locker affixed to the bulkhead, a spacious steel one. He yanked it open, and nearly let out a yell. There was someone occupying it. All he could see were two eyes peering from beneath crudely applied gauze tape wound around the whole head to serve as a gag and an ear muffler. The man's hands and legs were cruelly tied, and he'd been stuffed into the locker.

McKay closed the door quickly, crossed the cabin, and saw a letter opener on a small navigating desk. He picked it up. Near the cabin door, he wondered why they hadn't arrived yet. He put his ear against the panels. Packer was hissing something. McKay suddenly realized where he'd made a serious blunder. Dripping wet, he'd probably left a neat trail.

All Packer and his men had to do was stay in the corridor and wait for him to come out. McKay shivered violently. He tiptoed to the small window, which took

the place of the usual porthole. It was much too small to squirm through.

He found the lower part of the tiny window open and peered out. About ten feet forward was another and similar window. That would lead into the cabin farthest down the corridor.

McKay seized a fishing rod in one corner of the cabin. It was equipped with a good-sized sinker. He thrust it out of the window, allowed the sinker to drop toward the water for a distance of ten or eleven feet. Then he managed to get one arm and shoulder out the window. If Packer ever barged in now, the battle would be short and not very sweet.

McKay began swinging the line with its sinker until it was forming a fairly large arc. He yanked the line. The sinker hit the hull, missing the window of the next cabin by a couple of inches. The sinker made quite a thud. He heard excited whispers in the corridor.

He tried again. This time he succeeded in landing the sinker a glancing blow against the glass. It shattered, making enough noise to really draw attention. Feet scampered along the corridor.

McKay darted for the door, took his life in his hands when he opened it, and looked into the corridor. The cabin in which he'd broken the window was illuminated. McKay made a running dive for the companionway ladder, swarmed up it, and saw Pudge coming his way fast. McKay lowered his head and kept on going. He hit Pudge and they both went down. Before the crook could move, McKay had the point of the letter opener pressed against his back.

"One squirm," he hissed, "and I'll drive this trench knife right through your heart. It makes an awful mess."

PUDGE shuddered violently and let go of the gun he still held. McKay made him get up, hurried him over to the rail, and tossed him over into deep water. Pudge floundered around. McKay kicked the gun into the water, too, gave a run-jump and cleared the rail just as Packer and the third crook came on deck.

Guns blasted and bullets whizzed close. Then McKay was falling through space. He came up, took a quick breath, and dived again. The water was filled with tiny geysers caused by hot steel. He swam under water a short way, came up

again, and saw Pudge disappearing beneath the surface. He struck out toward him, his feet found firm land under the water, and soon he grasped Pudge by the collar.

Hoisting him up he saw that he'd been wounded. Packer had mistaken Pudge for McKay. It made the Marine grin a little. The darkness protected him quite well. He glanced at the ship. She was beginning to move. They were taking her, by means of the auxiliary engine, away from the shore.

Packer knew very well a horde of police would descend upon him shortly. If he could get it far out into the lake, he'd have time to go over the craft for those incriminating papers or whatever it was that Garrick had secreted.

McKay dragged the unconscious Pudge ashore. He examined him, saw that he was in no serious danger, then started toward the house. He veered off the path, however, when he heard someone coming his way. As the man passed by, he turned on a flashlight. In the reflected glow, McKay saw that it was Lieutenant Otis.

He called the detective to a halt. Five minutes later, McKay was putting on his clothes. With the help of Otis, he carried Pudge into Cunningham's house.

Otis said, "I heard of the mess you're in. I don't believe a word of it. I saw the ship sail. Those babies worked quietly until the shooting started. I never even knew there was anyone aboard. Did they find anything, McKay?"

"I don't think so," McKay grinned broadly. "We've got Pudge here. He'll be sore because they shot him. Even if he isn't, just show the rat a piece of sharp steel and he'll squeal like a pig. Lieutenant, Garrick really did leave a confession and list the names before he joined up, didn't he?"

"I'm pretty sure of it," Otis said. "The gang tried to stop him. In fact, they got quite rough about it, but Garrick was a funny kid. A petty crook, yes, but dog-gone patriotic. He must have seen what his friends really were and prepared his confession. But where did he put it? Not on the boat. I spent plenty of time searching it."

McKay said, "Lieutenant, there is something about Alex Garrick nobody seems to know. There never was a man

who got seasick so fast. Once we put him aboard a lifeboat when it was beached, and he got sick. He couldn't even set foot on a dummy ship rigged on land. It was like an obsession, so would he be apt to hide something on that sailing ship? I don't think so."

"But you can't reef sails on anything but a ship," Otis protested.

McKay nodded. "That's right and I got Garrick's message straight, too. So look behind you. Over Cunningham's desk. That picture—it's a glass-covered oil painting of the boat on the lake. That's more like Garrick's speed. Suppose we reef the sails on that picture, eh?"

THEY had the oil painting down in two minutes. Otis pried away the back. There was a well-folded piece of paper behind the canvas. Otis read it and whistled.

"Oh, boy, is this something? Know whose name heads this list of crooks? John Lorimer, Cunningham's partner before he became the D. A. Know what I think? Cunningham took young Garrick in as a handy man, because he thought he could instil some sense of honesty in him and make him confess. Perhaps Cunningham suspected Lorimer.

"Alex had a good opportunity to hide his confession here. At the time, he wasn't certain he wanted to talk. Tarawa showed him the truth. Lorimer was after Cunningham's job, too. An added reason for having Cunningham murdered. Hand me the phone. I'm going to burn the wires off."

"Sure thing, sir," McKay said. "But first you'd better send some kind of a craft after the boat Packer is on. I don't care so much about Packer, but they've got Alex Garrick's kid brother a prisoner aboard. They were holding him to make his sister toe the mark. That's why she wouldn't cooperate.

"I think the kid earned the trouble he's in, but we have to get him out. He must have heard me telling Peggy about the message for Cunningham. He contacted the mob, took gasoline out of Peggy's car and delayed us so they could reach Cunningham first."

"I reasoned it that way, too," Otis made his calls and then leaned back. "It's too bad Packer and that other fellow got away. They can beach the ship someplace, but we'll find them."

McKay hurried to a window and opened it. Faintly, he could hear yells for help. Strident, terrorized yells.

"They won't beach her," he grinned. "Lieutenant, once on one of those Jap-infested islands a party of Japs broke through our lines, got into a field hospital, and bayoneted every wounded Yank to death. We wanted to get those rats right there. We did. There was one boat on the island. We rigged it so she'd sink the moment she hit deep water. Then we forced the Japs toward her, let them weigh anchor and stood on the beach watching those rats drown or get picked off.

"I figured the same trick would work with Packer. I opened the sea valves, sir. I only hope they get the Garrick kid out of the locker before she sinks. I also made sure they wouldn't be able to launch the one lifeboat either."

Otis laughed. Things happened soon after that. Police arrived, commandeered a motorboat, and got all three men off the sailing ship. Packer came ashore with handcuffs on his wrists and a scowl on his face.

Pudge had already talked, explaining that the equipment of the pool room had been removed, then replaced after McKay got away, both to confuse the police and to make a fool of McKay. He told how they'd made Peggy Garrick obey them after kidnaping her from in front of Cunningham's home.

McKay said, "Lieutenant, thanks very much for helping me. For weeks I've been wondering just what I'd do when I took off my uniform. Well, I know now. If the cops will have me, I'll merely switch to copper blue.

"Right now I want to see Peggy. Maybe she'll like the idea, too."



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Rogues' Gallery Hanging

By Tom Marvin



IN FRONT of St. Mystica's, which gives Cathedral Lane its name, Sergeant Chesney stopped our squad car and fired a quick glance across the street at the apartment house numbered 1600.

"Go on in alone, son," Chesney told me. "You can tell your posterity that your first hitch on the force was a dangerous investigation of family trouble." He grinned at my rookie fidgets. "I'll wait in the car for you, detective. There's only

one rudiment to handling family trouble."

I got out of the squad car and crossed the street. Since this was my baptismal job, I had a buck fever interest in 1600 Cathedral Lane. Somehow the building reminded me of our colonel at Algiers; aloof, solid and cool even in the heat. A black and gold sign in one of the windows read *Atelier*. On the top floor, part of a white sheet was hanging out of a window.

At the far curb I turned and yelled at Chesney, "What's that rudiment of family trouble, Sarge?"

He spat a brown jet through the squad car window. "Why," he said, "just don't let the husband hit you on the head with a milk bottle, is all."

In the lobby of 1600 Cathedral Lane, a janitor wearing dungarees and a moldy green hat was swabbing the floor with a rat-tailed mop. But he picked up his mop and bucket and disappeared inside the building before I could hail him. So I looked at the directory of tenants over the five mailboxes.

It was a warren of artists, all right. The studio on the top floor was occupied by one *Johnni Anger*. The first floor was split up between somebody named *Dor-Sey DelaDame* and a party named *Bakosh*, all in small letters. One half of the English basement was tenanted by *Pardo*, janitor, apparently the bird I'd seen mopping the lobby.

But the occupant of the other basement apartment was simply *Lizzie Quinn*.

Among all those orchids it looked as refreshing as a hollyhock. The janitor had left the door unlatched, so I went inside and rapped on her door. Lizzie Quinn hollered, "*Entrez!*"

She was on her hands and knees, peering through a magnifying glass at a painting lying on the floor. She was wearing an orange wrapper and black mules, but she didn't look like anything out of a Halloween party. No, indeed.

I flashed my brand new shield casually, trying not to act as green as I felt. "We had a report of family trouble in this building, miss."

"Why Herb and I get along just peachy," Lizzie Quinn said. "Honest, you can ask him." She looked up at one of the cottage type windows, stuck two fingers in her mouth, and whistled. A blue cat materialized suddenly on the window

sill, grinning at me. "Ain't it so, Herb?" Lizzie Quinn asked the cat.

Her studio was so cool and peaceful you could almost hear pine trees sighing. Across the front, eleven windows in a row admitted a surprisingly lot of north light. On an easel stood an unfinished charcoal sketch that looked fair enough to my art-illiterate eye.

"This is the charcoal and cat department," Lizzie Quinn said. "You might find family trouble on the floors above. Take the stairway to the left, sir."

BACK in the dim hall, I uncapped my fountain pen and filled in the report sheet like a conscientious rookie should. I knew that Sergeant Chesney had sent me in alone just to see what in hell I would do. Across Cathedral Lane, St. Mystica's bells began chiming six P. M. This much I remember clearly.

I remember, too that I had climbed the stairs to the first floor landing when a shadow leaned over the bannister. It cracked me hard on the Panama.

St. Mystica's carillon seemed to rise in crescendo. It went right on up to 13 o'clock, on the double.

I sprawled forward on the steps. The rough carpeting scraped my chin and the fountain pen snapped and ink squirted like grapefruit. The ink ran down my wrist. Passing out, I thought, *That damned husband with his milk bottle!*

When I came to, I was lying on a couch in Lizzie Quinn's studio. She was on the hospitality committee, too, wiping fountain pen ink off my fingers. Cold towels swathed my head, so that I could see only a dime's worth of the white ceiling. I felt as helpless as a mud turtle on its back.

From the foot of the couch a man was watching me. He was a gangling blond guy wearing a long gingham apron and a brushy red mustache through which the final inch of a dead cigar jutted.

"I'm Bakosh, first floor," he said. "Water color impressions. I was cleaning up my studio when I heard you moaning in the hall. What happened to you?"

"I broke my fountain pen," I said.

Bakosh smiled faintly. "Did you break your cigars, too?"

I felt in my breast pocket. "They're o.k."

"What are you doing here? Who are you?"

I started to reach for my pristine cop shield. But Lizzie Quinn wouldn't let go of my hand. She was rubbing the ink off with an old paint rag and she hung on for dear life. She said hurriedly:

"Bakosh, this is one of my patrons. Mr.—Mr. Nosegay. Haven't I mentioned him to you?"

"No, you haven't, my cute competitor," Bakosh said, shortly.

Lizzie Quinn gestured with her slim shoulders. "Perhaps it slipped my mind, since Mr. Nosegay is very rich. But I think he has bought all of my work that he intends to, so you can unload some of your junk on him now, Bakosh."

"A collector?" Bakosh said with a rising inflection of interest. "Or perhaps Mr. Nosegay is investing his capital?"

"Every loose cent," Lizzie Quinn assured him firmly, "and that's considerable."

I lay on the couch and shut my eyes. Who's she talking about—me? All I want to collect is that shadow which larrupped me. But Mr. Bakosh, first floor water color impressions, seemed to find me pleasing.

"Mr. Nosegay is wise," he said solemnly, "to put his wealth into *objets d'art*. Art will live. Art will hold its values forever. No matter what happens to the world's economy."

He leaned toward me and whispered confidentially. "And the economy is tottering. Soon money will be worth less than paper. But if your wealth lies in the world's treasures of art, ah, then you are securely wealthy indeed!"

He took one of my cigars out of my pocket, jammed it into my mouth, and held a match. "Perhaps," the screwball suggested, "Mr. Nosegay will inspect my impressions? Sometime?"

"Sometime," I said.

Bakosh, first floor water color impressions, bowed and strode out of the studio. I looked at Lizzie Quinn. She became suddenly busy folding up the old paint rag very neatly.

"Why didn't you want Bakosh to know that I'm a copper?" I asked. "Or almost a copper."

"I'll bet your head hurts terrifically," she said. "I'm sorry I can't let you rest here, but I must start dressing." She laughed. "I have a dinner date with a perfectly good 4-F. You aren't a 4-F, by any chance?"

"The Army kissed me off after Tunisia. But I'm still sound enough for copperhood. If I can make the grade."

"Well, the market's opening up again!" she said.

She had violet eyes. We were looking at each other with great speculative interest when Sergeant Chesney barged through the door.

In the squad car I had ticketed him as a sleepy-eyed, lethargic cop. Now he chilled me like a clap of thunder.

"Rookie, follow me!" Chesney barked.

Obediently, I scrambled off the couch and trailed after him, up the stairs. En route I picked up my Panama. It bore a greasy smudge on the crown, where the shadow had dented it with his club.

ON THE second floor, outside a door marked *Johnni Anger, Leather Tooling*, Chesney was waiting for me. The door stood ajar. Through it I saw a man lying on his face under the windows.

He was in his shirt sleeves, stretched across an ornamental prayer rug, and he seemed to have a horn growing out of his back. It was the handle of a foreign-looking dirk.

"Rookie," said Chesney, with a formal and foreboding gentleness, "you got sent into this building on an investigation. Our little family trouble turns out to be a guy got murdered. But down in the basement I find you batting the breeze with a doll. Maybe the murderer strolled out while you was holding court on that couch."

His gentleness dissolved into a bellow. "Rookie, we can't use a man like you!"

The egg on my head began to pulse like fury. I started to explain about the belt on the noggin, but Chesney was in no mood for listening. "You're excused," he barked. "You can go home now, if you got carfare. You ain't riding in my squad car ever again!"

With a complete dismissal of me, big Chesney got on a telephone in the reception hall and called downtown. I stood around wondering whether you're supposed to take a police sergeant literally, like you do those army non-coms. Finally I stepped into the studio and looked at the body. This was the first casualty I'd ever seen without a uniform on. Judging from the back of his neck, he was a young guy.

Chesney was telling headquarters that the dead man was Johnni Anger, some kind of artist. I kept out of his sight, gaping around the studio. It was a barn of a place, roomy and cluttered. There was a workbench, littered with tools and scraps of leather, in one corner. Under the windows which fronted on Cathedral Lane stood a rumpled daybed. Part of the top sheet was hanging out one of the open windows.

I saw a black smudge in a corner of the sheet and smoothed it out. The smudge was a scrawl of letters, probably hastily printed with the black crayon that lay on the floor near the daybed. The letters spelled out, WINGO.

Several other crayons lay on the window sill. To my untutored eye it looked as if this leather tooler, Johnni Anger, had known what was in the cards for him when he got stabbed. Maybe he had lived long enough to reach for one of the crayons on the window sill. Maybe he tried to write a message on his bedsheet. Anything, the first confused thought of a man about to die.

What he'd managed to scribble—WINGO—made no sense to me, but perhaps young Anger hadn't lived to complete it. He did have time, though, to shove part of the sheet through the window, as a sort of flag of distress.

"Rookie!" Chesney hollered. "I told you to drag freight!"

Yep, take cop sergeants literally, too. I dragged freight down the staircase. On the first floor, Bakosh's door was closed. The door across the hall, however, was open a couple of inches.

I heard a man inside apparently talking on a telephone. He said, "Twelve-fifty tonight, Mrs. Bennett."

The sign on this door read, *Atelier of DorSey DelaDame*. I knocked, and Dela-Dame called, "Yes?" I went inside.

He was sitting at the telephone with an ash tray full of cigarette stubs at one elbow and a typewritten list of some kind at the other. He was a chunky, apple-cheeked guy, smartly dressed in a tan suit of some silky weave and tan cordovan shoes. They were as interesting a pair of kicks as ever I clapped eyes on. He must have been a sculptor, because there were some old rocks lying around the place and a few plaques that looked no better than the guesswork I used to do in high school.

"I dropped in to see Mr. Bakosh," I said, "but I can't seem to raise him. My name is Nosegay."

"Bakosh stepped out to buy some wine. I don't know when he's coming back. See him later."

Back in the hall I lingered outside DelaDame's closed door, listening to his telephone dials clicking. He was telling everyone on his list the same dope. Twelve-fifty tonight. He was going down his list expertly, like a bucket shop operator.

Squads from headquarters began pulling up outside No. 1600. Being new, I wouldn't know any of those cops. I didn't want to meet them anyway, so I slipped down to Lizzie Quinn's studio to give them a chance to go upstairs without spotting me. Chesney could fill them in on my brilliant work.

LIZZIE QUINN was sitting on her couch, weeping, and talking with the janitor I had seen in the lobby, the man named Pardo. His moldy green hat was tilted back on his head. From under white eyebrows his eyes looked scared.

"A man's been killed," he told me. "There's a cop upstairs."

I didn't recognize his accent, but it wasn't Virginian.

"I want to talk with Miss Quinn alone," I said.

Pardo picked up his mop and bucket and moved toward the door, shaking his head. "The cop told me somebody reported family trouble in this building. And nobody in here is even married!"

Lizzie Quinn, I think, noticed the janitor's mop about the same time I did, for her red eyes threw me a startled glance. Pardo's mop handle was broken in two, snapped off clean a foot from the wire. I was willing to bet all my chances of ever making the force that his mop was the club which cracked me on the Panama.

Lizzie Quinn forgot to cry, waiting for me to put the arm on Pardo, I suppose. But I let him go unmolested. When the door closed, I said to her. "I gather Johnni Anger was your perfectly good 4-F dinner date?"

She sniffed a couple of times and tucked her handkerchief into a pocket of her orange wrapper. "He was a peach of a guy."

"I eat dinner occasionally, too," I

pointed out. "And the police department won't be needing me. Not at all."

Herb, the cat, jumped up on the couch beside her, and she brushed the blue fur. She said suddenly, "Call for me at ten o'clock. Bring an extra fifty dollars."

"Thanks for the estimate on the job, of course, it's a mere nothing to a man of Mr. Nosegay's means."

"Is a job on the police department worth fifty dollars?"

"I see what you mean," I said. "Ten o'clock, then."

"I'm not sure I know what I mean at all. Perhaps you'll be wasting your money."

I opened the door. Lizzie Quinn shooed the blue cat off the couch and stood up. "You saw Pardo's broken mop. Why didn't you arrest him or something?"

"Because Pardo wasn't the guy who conked me with it."

"Who did?"

"DorSey DelaDame, first floor busts."

There weren't any officers in the hall. I slipped out of 1600 Cathedral Lane and walked quickly down the street. Our squad car—rather, Chesney's squad car—was still parked in front of St. Mystica's. I couldn't look it in the face.

I didn't leave the neighborhood. In the next block I found a little pub and lunch room run by an Athenian. I sat at the bar talking with him and drinking Dick Smiths until ten o'clock. After he found out I'd been in Tunisia, most of the drinks were free. He made me tell him over and over how many Germans I had shot the hell out of.

As the Dick Smiths began working I hiked the count up to a couple thousand. It seemed to make the Athenian happy, and I began to believe it myself.

Police cars passed the pub occasionally, fanning out from 1600 Cathedral Lane on their mysterious errands. Whenever they moaned past I didn't feel as good as I had liquor enough to warrant. The sirens seemed to recreate Sergeant Chesney's scathing contempt, or his deceptive gentleness, or his final exploding howl of dismissal.

"You need a drink, pal," the Athenian said. But he made me eat a pair of salami sandwiches and drink a pint of black coffee, before he'd let me out for my date at ten.

No. 1600 and I were lit up like a theater marquee. Lizzie Quinn let me in,

looked me over, and murmured, "Oh, dandy!"

She was wearing some kind of two-tone outfit, a cerise top and a black skirt with a cerise ruffle like crimped crepe paper zooming across the front. Her black hair was piled on top of her head like my mother's washerwoman used to wear hers, only this was strictly from queenliness.

We went outside, and Lizzie sort of tossed me into her coupé. "And you're taking me out," she said, easing the car out into traffic. "By the by, what's your name?"

"Nosegay. Arbutus L. Nosegay."

"Come, come, blithe spirit."

"It's Nosegay," I repeated firmly. "Did a cop question you after I left? A broth of a man with a trigger temper named Chesney?"

"He questioned everybody. I told him all I could."

"Did you mention that it was you who telephoned a report of family trouble at Number 1600?"

"He didn't ask me that question, luckily."

"But wasn't it you, Lizzie? Why did you phone headquarters?"

"Because I'd heard a terrific argument going on upstairs somewhere. I wanted the police to get there before somebody got hurt. I didn't know exactly what to tell them, so I said family trouble."

"Who was arguing, Lizzie?"

"I recognized Johnni Anger's voice. He was raving angry about something. I didn't recognize the other voice."

"You mean," I said, "that you're afraid to mention the other guy's name?"

"It was Bakosh," she said.

She tooted the horn to pass a truck, and pulled back into her lane. "How do you know it was DorSey DelaDame who beat you with Pardo's mop?"

"His shoes. His lovely tan cordovan gunboats."

"Mr. Nosegay, you've got a dandy package," Lizzie said.

"His shoes, I tell you. He had some of my fountain pen ink on his tan shoes. The pen smashed when I fell. The ink splattered over me, the wall, and Dela-Dame's pretty shoes. I went into his room and looked him over. I noticed the ink stains right away, because otherwise he was decked out like a matinee idol."

"He used to be a third rate actor. Now

he's a terrible sculptor. He can hardly carve soap."

It was warm in the car. My eyelids started sagging. I snuggled into the corner, and the last I recall was Lizzie saying, bitterly, "Arbutus L. Nosegay, you're *such* a sparkling date!"

I DON'T know how far we drove. Lizzie woke me up by clouting me in the face with her handbag. I got out of the car in a dark street of rattletrap houses which I didn't recognize. The street was more like an alley, only a block long.

She had found parking space for her little coupé, although the curbs were lined with automobiles. Big babies. Some of them had uniformed drivers sitting on the running boards. She led me up a brick sidewalk to a stilted clapboard house. But instead of climbing the stairs we passed underneath them to the basement door.

Inside the door, Bakosh was sitting at a card table, accepting fifty bucks from everybody who came in. "Welcome to our little soiree," he greeted me. "I'd like to talk with you privately later. Go right in. After, of course, your..."

I forked over fifty bucks. "And another fifty dollars for Lizzie?"

Lizzie said, "I get in for free, because I'm part of the local color. Come on back and meet the screwballs."

The general motif of the rear room was blindness. We had to grope. In the center stood a round ice cream parlor table and a single kitchen chair, under one red bulb which was the only light. Mulberry curtains covered the walls. They stifled the chatter of the twenty or thirty people in the place—I couldn't count them accurately because of the dimness. They were just shapes behind cigarette glows.

"What's all this?" I asked Lizzie.

"Bohemia, you merry little man. Don't you recognize the types?"

I did, when I could see better. Most of the guests were women, the never-see-forty-again kind, loaded with ice and toting fifteen-inch cigarette holders. Some wore slacks and others wore shoulderless creations, but they all managed to have a skintight look around the eyes and ratty hair-dos. In the gloom, I couldn't make much out of the men present, except that they were well upholstered and panting for trouble.

Bakosh came into the smoky room and clapped his hands. "General Vadrugno has been delayed, *messieurs et mesdames*. But he will appear presently, and, I assure you, bring a most interesting message. Meanwhile, joy!"

Joy got off to a draggy start. Somebody brought around a tray of wine. A half dozen of the ladies took turns sitting at the ice cream parlor table under the crimson light and reciting poems about the ego which they must have composed themselves.

In a lull, Lizzie succeeded in finding a radio among the shadows and tuned in a dance band. We started gliding around to the schmalz, and this was more like it. She whispered:

"Arbutus Nosegay, you're carrying a flask in your pocket."

"Ssh! This flask shoots bullets." I got a fresh grip. "Lizzie, am I missing the point of this jamboree?"

"I don't know what the point of these parties is. No one ever tells me anything, because they think I'm a dumb bunny. I am, too. But I've done my part. I brung you."

Bakosh came into the shadowy room and snapped off the radio irritably. "Dancing!" he snorted. "When we have matters of the utmost importance!" He waited for the dancing feet to still. "And now I present to you General Vadrugno, who has made his way to America to address us!"

He hitched up the mulberry curtain. General Vadrugno stepped into the crimson room and clicked us a salute. With a cry of affection, Bakosh kissed the general on both wrinkled cheeks. There was a momentary rapt hush, then the din of applause wafted around the padded room like wings beating.

The general marched to the ice cream parlor table and began to make his speech. We all sat on the floor to listen. His sky-blue uniform sported a breastful of campaign ribbons. He had a brace of jack-o-lantern mustachios that got in his way when he talked. These, together with his heavy accent, made him damn-nigh unintelligible.

But I gathered he had come recently from Kovnia, where he had been a white hope of the guerrillas, just to give us a little spiel. He had come by rowboat and fishing smack and submarine.

His oration, from there, turned into

an old-fashioned political soapbox speech. At first it bored me, but presently he started taking picks on some Americans that I go for. In my view, when you pick on these guys you pick on America.

"Lizzie," I whispered. "Are the Kovnians on our team?"

"Aren't they?"

"This Kovnian isn't talking that way."

"What makes you think he's a Kovnian? You can't tell a Kovnian without a score card."

AS he got madder, General Vadragnos's mustachios kept flirting around like scorpion feelers. "This plight that I find America in," he hollered, "will lead to its ruin, and soon! You are being managed badly! Your currency has been debased, so that all of you, my substantial friends, must fight for your very wealth!"

The rich zanies gave him a hand. But I had poured just enough of that Californian red on top of the Athenian's bourbon to feel a poor man's urge to be impolite to the guest of honor. Muscularly impolite. I didn't cotton to the idea of a guy with an accent running down the government.

"Personally, I'm as American as Elm Street," I said aloud.

I untangled myself from the floor, and started across the murky room for General Vadragnos. Lizzie Quinn scrambled up and threw a block on me. I hit the wood again. Nobody seemed to pay any attention except Bakosh, who got up with a gesture of annoyance, and beckoned to us. He tiptoed down the hall into an ante-room. Lizzie and I followed him.

"Mr. Nosegay," Bakosh said, "I have great news for you. General Vadragnos has brought you a caryatid!"

"Well, strike me blue!" I said. "For nothing?"

"Of course not! For twenty thousand dollars. Cash."

"What's a caryatid?"

His mouth dropped open as if I had said a naughty word. Lizzie Quinn interjected hastily, "Don't clown, Mr. Nosegay. You know very well that a caryatid is a piece of sculpture."

"I saw one once that weighed a ton," I said. "But twenty thousand bucks!"

"It's by Gubinsniak," Bakosh said. "The greatest sculptor in all Kovnia. General Vadragnos brought it with him."

"Just for little me? Didn't it crowd the rowboat?"

"It was in Mexico City," Bakosh said disgustedly. He shrugged. "Never mind, one of the other guests will jump at the chance."

"And you're faker enough to pluck him," I said.

Lizzie Quinn took my elbow firmly and led me into a corner. "You quiet down, Mr. Nosegay," she whispered, "or Bakosh will throw you right out into Wingott Street."

I quieted down. I got sober as a bishop, too. My toes began to curl and my shoulder blades to crawl. The bullet-shooting "flask" under my arm felt as comforting an angel's paw.

"What's this house address?" I whispered. "Is it twelve-fifty Wingott Street?"

"The number was nailed on the door as clear as crystal."

"It wasn't clear as crystal the way I first heard it."

Bakosh put a hand on my shoulder. "Nosegay," he said, "I don't like your attitude. I don't believe you're an investor at all. I think you're a ginned-up bum. Now, clear out of here."

His brushy red mustache curled with artistic disdain. He placed a bony hand against my chest and rammed me into the wall. He turned and started out of the room. But I bounced off the plaster and chopped a right hand over his shoulder. It caught Bakosh below the ear. He crashed into the door frame. His long legs bent and he slid wordlessly down the door frame like a fireman down the brass pole.

Lizzie Quinn said, "I hope you know what you're doing?"

FROM the rear room General Vadragnos's throaty voice raved on. But from the other direction, up the musty hall, other voices intruded. A flashlight sprayed over the dirty pane in the street door. I heard Sergeant Chesney saying, "Ollmert, take Rains and cover the back."

Chesney was on the premises with a mop-up detail.

All I could think of was, *No you don't, Chesney! I saw these jokers first! General Vadragnos is mine, accent and all.*

"Lizzie," I said, "how you betting on what we find inside of the general's uniform? Pardo or DelaDame?"

"DelaDame, first floor busts," she said. "If it's not Pardo, I owe you my watch."

I ran back through the hall, into the dim room. I tripped noisily over an outstretched foot and skidded into the circle of red light with General Vadrugno. I grabbed his jack-o'-lantern mustachios and peeled.

And I guessed wrong. Oh, the mustachios moulted, all right. But it wasn't Pardo behind them. It was DelaDame, the third-rate actor, and I owed Lizzie Quinn my watch. DelaDame slung the ice cream parlor table against my hips. I did a somersault among the lolling customers.

By the time I dug out my "flask," DelaDame was sitting on my chest, using his fists as hammers. I could smell the grease paint on his apple cheeks. The hand I jammed under his chin skidded on his makeup and wiped off some of his wrinkles.

People were yelling and trying to bust through the mulberry curtains. A half dozen torches suddenly bobbed over them. Above the racket I could hear Chesney bellowing orders to his detail. I rocked violently on the floor until DelaDame bucked off my chest. Then I slammed him on the head with the side of my pistol.

A flashlight picked us out. Chesney said, "The lady-killing rookie."

"You're late, Chesney," I told him.

"Well, we ain't as smart as you. It took us dumb guys a while to figure out that Johnni Anger might have been trying to write Wingott Street on his bedsheet."

"Now that you're here, what you fixing to do?"

"Pinch the house," Chesney said.

"A sledge hammer cop," I remarked pleasantly.

"What would you do, Scotland Yard?" Chesney asked in his forebodingly gentle voice.

"Take Bakosh and DelaDame downtown and book 'em for murdering Johnni Anger, the leather tooler."

Somewhere in the room's gloom a cop snickered. Big Chesney allowed himself a jigger of a smile. "Why, we already got the guy that stuck Anger. He's the janitor of the joint, name of Pardo."

Back in the shadows a couple of cops broke into howls of laughter.

"Wait," I said. "Wait." Everybody waited. In the silence I couldn't think of anything further to say. Chesney let me

stew in my juice a while before he said: "Pardo was legging it away from the house. He had a satchel full of dough. It looks like we got a strong robbery motive."

"Looks like?" I said. "Pardo hasn't confessed?"

"Oh, patience, patience." Chesney squinted into the shadows. "Olmert, bring that janitor in here."

A cop went out to the cars and returned with Pardo and a black English kitbag plastered with old travel labels. Two other cops dragged Bakosh in and planted him in the kitchen chair. I saw Lizzie Quinn elbowing her way toward me.

All this time Chesney had been bending over General Vadrugno.

"Ain't this guy the stone-chiseler on the first floor?" he asked me. "This DelaDame is clean, rookie. I questioned him most of the evening myself."

"Thus delaying our little party. DelaDame had to go somewhere and put on his general suit. He got here late."

The sight of DelaDame's greasepaint and monkey suit had knocked a little cockiness out of the sarge. He only looked at me, when I motioned for the cop to bring Pardo and his kitbag over into the light.

"They got this loused up," Pardo said excitedly. "I didn't stick nobody!"

Under some shirts and a dressing gown, the kitbag was more than a quarter full of the green, neatly banded in stacks about the thickness of house bricks. Handing it back to the cop I noticed that the kitbag left smudges of black dust on my palms.

"Chesney," I said, "I've been working hard on this case. Are you interested in my results?"

"You want time and a half for the work you done in that Greek's saloon?"

It was a shot in the arm to the morale, knowing that Chesney had kept a watch on me after I'd washed out.

"Sarge," I said, "what's the price of panic? Well, today it was murder."

HERE you see a lot of expensive folks. Smart folk. But they've already been clipped by Bakosh and DelaDame. How? Because Bakosh and DelaDame sold them some panic. They convinced them that America was going to get hit by dangerous inflation, and that their money would be no good. They per-

sueded these folks to invest in art treasures on the theory that their money then would be safe. After the inflationary period passed, they could get their dough back by resales."

From back in the crowd a guy cut in heatedly, "But many well-to-do people are buying diamonds and works of art."

"Sure, through reputable dealers. Stop me if I'm wrong. Bakosh and DelaDame claimed that, because they're artists, they could pick the right things for you to buy. They demanded cash from you. Now, what have you gotten for your dough?"

"Nothing—yet."

"And you won't. They intended to lam. They threw these jamborees just to feed you their sales talk. This was to be the last party, so DelaDame polished up his medals and really poured on the sales pressure. Hell, they even tried to sell me a caryatid by Gubiniak."

"By whom?"

"That's what I say," I said.

Chesney scratched his head. "Finance I'm not up on. But if these folks got receipts for their dough, how you going to prove fraud?"

"Are you interested in fraud or murder?" I asked him. "Johnni Anger found out what was going on down here at twelve-fifty Wingott Street. He had a drag-out argument with Bakosh about it today. Miss Quinn phoned it in as family trouble. But about the time we were getting over to 1600 Cathedral Lane, Bakosh closed the argument by sticking Anger with the dirk. He wasn't going to let Anger queer this deal."

"Say, rookie," Chesney said, "Miss Quinn told me how you got rapped on the noggin. I guess I acted hastily."

"DelaDame heard me wander into the building while Bakosh was upstairs knocking off Anger. He got hold of Pardo's mop while Pardo was puttering around. He smacked me with it to give Bakosh time to get downstairs. Then Bakosh put on a long apron to cover up

the stains on his suit until he had time to change, and he lugged me into Lizzie's studio. DelaDame sneaked back into his own place, and started telephoning the suckers to remind them of the party."

"How," asked Chesney, "did you figure out so fast that Johnni Anger was trying to write down Wingott Street, but never lived long enough to add the t's?"

I felt a slim hand creeping into mine and heard Lizzie Quinn's clear voice speaking up. "Arbutus L. Nosegay," she said, "is a whiz."

"Nosegay," the sarge grunted. "His name is Bob Brown."

"As American as Elm Street," Lizzie said.

I remembered that I owed her my watch, among other things.

I said to Pardo, "Did Bakosh and DelaDame hide their kitbag in the chimney? It still has soot on it."

"It was the coal pile. Bakosh brung it down to the furnace room and asked me to stash it for him until the cops blew."

"What were you supposed to get out of the deal?"

"Well, they promised me a caryatid by Gubiniak. But, hell, I'm as American as Elm Street, too. I'd rather have U. S. A. dollars. So I offed with the satchel tonight, and the law grabbed me."

Chesney's squad began writing down the names and addresses of the jamboree guests, and the amounts they had kicked in to Bakosh and DelaDame. A couple cops had to carry DelaDame out to the cars, but they finally got him, Bakosh, and Pardo and started downtown.

Chesney himself was the last man out of twelve-fifty Wingott Street. When he came out, Lizzie Quinn and I were sitting on the running board of her coupé, trying to settle who got custody of my watch. you can't do business by moonlight.

"Well, buster," the sarge said heartily, "there's our good old squad car. Hop in and I'll run you home."

"Tomorrow," I said. "Tonight I'm going home with the gal what brung me."



Self-Made Mankiller

By Ken Lewis

Marston ghosted a suicide note that would make him a hot-seat haunt.



IN THE world's eyes, old Jonathan M. Hitchcock was the ideal symbol of a self-made man, Rodger Marston reflected. It was fitting that Hitchcock should also be self-destroyed—in the world's eyes.

Lugging the bulging brief case, Marston slipped out of his private office and down the darkened corridor to the door marked *President*. Layered with sweat, his temples pounded and his knees almost buckled under him. But he made it.

Four floors below, the laboratories of Kemlab, Inc., were brilliantly lighted, murmurous with activity, as the night staff of technicians experimented with the latest scientific methods for exterminating the Axis.

But here on the sixth-floor tier of offices, the only light came from the frosted panels of the two doors opening on this corridor. The only kill-method about to undergo experimentation was the oldest in the world: A heavy blunt instrument. And the only sound was the erratic tapping of old Hitchcock's typewriter.

The old man had never learned to dictate smoothly. That fit well with Marston's plan. Hitchcock wrote rough drafts of his most important letters himself, hunching over his typewriter late at night to punch out the characters laboriously with a blunt index finger. Each morning his blonde secretary took the drafts from a desk drawer and trotted them off to be transcribed.

Marston waited till the typewriter beyond the door stopped tapping and the muffled closing of a desk drawer announced that Hitchcock was through for the night. Then he entered the room.

The square, dumpy man at the desk looked up sourly. "Damn you, haven't you found the carbons of those release orders

on that defective shipment yet?" he barked. Marston reddened, biting his lip.

Glaring at each other across the desk top, the two contrasted strikingly. Hitchcock was short, blunt-featured, bald; Marston tall, slender, darkly aquiline. Hitchcock had reached his presidency the hard way, starting as a stock boy. It had taken him thirty-five years.

Marston's methods had been simpler and much quicker. He had become vice-president in five months—after marrying Hitchcock's daughter. The old man hadn't wanted him. But Hitchcock's life was wrapped up in those two kids of his. And Elaine had insisted on the vice-presidency.

Then had come the telegram about Johnny, Jr., killed in an exploding plane over Italy. It had staggered the old man. He'd relinquished more and more duties to his son-in-law.

That had been fine—till the War Department investigation. But now it was time for Jonathan M. Hitchcock to die...

Wiping sweat from his forehead, Marston glanced at the open floor-level French window behind the desk and nodded. No lights showed in the windows opposite. Dipping into the brief case, he moved unsteadily around the desk to the old man's elbow.

"Here's what you've been asking for!" he rasped.

Wrapped in a dust cloth, the heavy granite paperweight plowed into the back of Hitchcock's skull while Hitchcock's mouth was still open. The old man groaned, slumped forward in the chair, head lolling on the desk beside the typewriter.

Only a very little blood reddened the bruise. Not enough to drip or run. That was good. It wasn't necessary for Hitchcock to be dead yet—just unconscious. Marston's temples stopped throbbing. He was suddenly cool, steady, precise as an automaton.

He returned the rag-swathed paperweight to the case, extracted rubber gloves, pulled them on. He rolled a piece of Hitchcock's bond paper into the type-writer and batted out the suicide note. Remembering Hitchcock's attention to details, he began with the date.

July 11, 1944

Heaven forgive me, I can't stand it any longer. When I think that my own boy or others like him may have died because of defective equipment supplied by my company, and with my knowledge,

He left it that way, unfinished. He pulled it from the roller, crumpled it, pressed Hitchcock's sweaty fingers around it briefly. Then he tossed it in the wastebasket under the desk.

That was a stroke of genius. It would explain why the note was unsigned. The police would find it almost as readily as if it were still in the machine. They'd think the old man had discarded the idea of a note after half-finishing one.

He grasped Hitchcock's collar, held him in the chair while he swiveled it to the open French window. With a gasping heave, he tipped the chair forward, spilling Hitchcock over the low sill into nothingness.

From this height, Marston hardly heard the crunching thud of the body against the cobblestones of a blind alley six floors below. He didn't even shudder. The alley was seldom used at night. The corpse probably wouldn't be found before daylight. And the fall would obliterate all traces of the bruise at the back of the skull.

He wheeled the chair back to the desk, walked out, leaving the lights on. He was whistling jauntily and spinning the brief case, when the elevator down the hall arrived in answer to his buzz.

"Finally outlasted the old man, Sam," he grinned, stepping into the cage. "He went off and left his lights burning, too. Such extravagance!"

The elevator boy grinned back. "No suh, Mr. Marston," he said. "Mr. Hitchcock ain't left yet. Ain't had no calls to this floor since you come up two hours ago."

Marston remembered to look slightly perplexed but not worried. "Funny," he said. "When I stopped by his office to say good night, the lights were on but he wasn't there."

Sam stifled a yawn. "Prob'ly back in the washroom, Mr. Marston," he said.

CROSSING the deserted bridge on his way home, Marston slowed the roadster enough to toss the brief case into the river. That was all right. He had an identical, letter-filled brief case hidden in his bedroom closet in case anyone should ask for it later. He also had an identical paperweight on his desk at the office.

He was deep in the exhausted sleep of reaction when his wife answered the shrill ringing of the telephone at 5:30 a.m., to learn that her father was dead . . .

Busy with funeral arrangements, Marston didn't reach his office till late the next afternoon. He noticed that the noon editions had carefully skirted the suicide issue. Evidently the police hadn't released the note yet. He hoped they'd found it, though. That was important.

When he got to his desk, he was sure they had. For round-faced, Detective Lieutenant Oscar Braden awaited him. "Sorry about the old man's murder," Braden said expressionlessly.

Marston's dark face bleached and his temples started to pound. "Murder!" he echoed. "But I—I thought it was an accident!"

Braden wagged his fat face negatively. "Murder," he repeated. "The D.A. thinks you done it. He can convince a jury, too. You had motive and opportunity. We got the elevator boy's statement that you two were the only ones here last night."

Marston moistened suddenly dry lips. "Nonsense!" he quavered. "The old man's death was the worst thing that could happen to me. I'll probably lose my job now. I—I don't stand in too well with the board of directors . . ." His voice trailed off embarrassedly.

Braden nodded. "It wasn't the job worried you. It was a nice fat rap for defraudin' the government. Maybe treason. We checked the signatures on them papers releasin' the defective Army stuff for shipment. Hitchcock's name was forged."

"Funny. When we questioned him before, he admitted signin' a lot of papers lately without payin' much attention to what was in 'em. The shock of his kid's death knocked him a long ways downhill. He himself thought he'd signed them releases. And no one would have thought to

Holocaust House

By Gene D. Robinson



Baffling Novolet

★ ★ ★

They mistook Race Bennett for a relative when the private dick was admitted to that holocaust house party. And even though Race wasn't a blood kin, he had to yell uncle when his hidden host started to divide the family bullets.

★ ★ ★

CHAPTER I

THE girl was stylishly dressed and strikingly pretty. Just now, as she was ushered into the office of Race Bennett, her face looked troubled.

Race rose, waved her into a seat across from his desk. "I've been expecting you, Miss Darrow." He picked up a telegram. "You asked me by wire if I could give you my time for a week, perhaps longer; said you'd explain your proposition fully when you arrived. You asked my immediate reply."

The girl nodded and Race added, "It was difficult to give you an answer in the dark that way. But I did. I told you

I would be at your service. I hope"—grinning cheerfully—"you haven't cased some bank for robbing and expect me to wield a tommy-gun."

"Nothing like that, Mr. Race." The girl smiled faintly. "Since I have succeeded in retaining you, may I suggest we be on our way at once. I'm late already, and we're three hundred miles from our destination. I can explain fully on the way."

Race studied her a few moments silently. He knew nothing whatever about the girl, whom he guessed was in her early twenties. But he read character in her steady eyes, honesty of purpose in her determined manner. He rose and bowed slightly. "I'll be ready to start within fifteen minutes, Miss Darrow. May I ask how you plan to make the trip?"

"My car is in the parking lot around the corner," she said. "I'm a good driver."

Race looked interested. "I'm sure of that. And if I must be taken for a ride"—his eyes twinkled—"I'm sure I could not have found a more attractive captor. Let me give my employees some instructions and I'll be with you. I keep a bag packed and ready." He passed out the door.

Twenty-five minutes later the girl and the detective left the parking lot in her black sedan. She skillfully traversed the traffic-laden streets, speedily gained the outskirts of town. Little more was said till they had left the city limits. Then the girl said:

"Perhaps it will explain a lot, Mr. Bennett, if I tell you I'm the niece of Roger Leymore."

Race started. "It surely does, Miss Darrow. Let's see now. I've read feature stories in the papers about his island estate. Covers a thousand acres, I believe. A half-mile of water on every side except a narrow strip that is bridged. A huge castle of a home built of cedar and mahogany. Keeps a guard at the bridge to drive away the curious. Is that correct?"

Janice Darrow smiled wistfully. "I really do not know. You see, I have never been in my uncle's home." She pressed her foot down, and Race watched the speedometer needle climb to sixty.

"Two days ago I received a special delivery letter from Uncle Roger. The first letter I ever received from him. It stated

crisply that he expected me to come immediately to his island home. Failure to do so would mean that I would be cut off entirely from his will, he said. I was warned that no attention would be paid to any kind of a reply, such as telegram, letter, or telephone.

"I didn't know what to do. My mother, before she died, had often told me how eccentric and unpredictable Uncle Roger was. It was the first time in my twenty-two years that he had paid me the slightest attention. I was frightened. Of what, I didn't know. So I—"

"You had heard of my agency and decided to ask me to accompany you; to protect you—just in case," Race finished.

"Yes, that's it. Uncle Roger is wealthy, as you know. I hope"—biting her lip—"you do not think I am alarmed about being cut out of his will. I had never counted on being in it. I thought perhaps he might need me. Then I recalled he and Mother had never gotten along well together. It occurred to me he might want to vent his spite on me. I had heard of you, decided to retain you. That's all I am able to tell you."

Race lit a cigarette. "I read a magazine story once about Roger Leymore," he said. "Seems he had an ironclad determination to make money. He went to the Klondike after gold. Whipped there, he bummed his way to the Philippines, failed again. Then he sought the elusive metal in Australia and again met failure. All this only strengthened his determination to strike it rich. He tried Death Valley, California, and Montana, bummed his way to far corners of the world, anywhere he thought he might find gold.

"His parents passed away; his brothers and sisters gave him up as a wandering fool. Finally he did strike it rich in Alaska where he had first failed. He became rich at forty-five. He never married. He acquired a reputation for being stubborn, eccentric, and hard-to-get-along-with, became obsessed with a belief that was hard to disperse that everyone was after his money. Then he built this island fortress—home if you like—swung a huge, steel gate at one end of the only bridge. Every would-be visitor was cross-examined at the gate. Leymore had to know the exact purpose

of a visit before any person was admitted."

He studied the speedometer. The needle was hanging steadily on sixty. "I think, Miss Darrow," he said, "you're in for an interesting visit. And I'm sure"—laughing—"I won't be bored myself."

MOST of their trip was made under a glowering sky. The last fifty miles was through a driving rain and crash of thunder. The Leymore island was twenty miles from the nearest town. By the time they pulled up before the huge, steel gate barring entrance to the bridge, the rain had slackened.

A tall man wearing a slicker strode out to the car window. "Tell me your names, please," he said as he took out a paper. "If it's on here, you can pass through."

The girl gave her name. The gate keeper nodded. "Okay," he said and looked at Race. "Who are you?"

Janice Darrow spoke up, "He's my chauffeur. His name would hardly be on your list."

"Oh, yeah? Where's his uniform? Why ain't he driving?"

"Listen," the girl spoke haughtily. "Since you're a guard, where is your uniform? My chauffeur never wears a uniform. I'm driving because I wanted to. Any more silly questions?"

The fellow squinted at her. "Sister, you win. The boss said to admit only relatives, but if this guy's got a hundred bucks he can come in, too."

The girl gasped. "What do you mean?"

"Boss's orders, miss. Said each relative had to pay a hundred bucks at the gate, or stay out. Maybe it's to pay your board here. Don't ask me the answer. Pay up or stay out."

She glanced at Race, received a nod. "I'll pay it," she said, opening her bag. "But just wait till I see that uncle of mine." Counting out two hundred dollars, she gave it to the guard. He grinned, swung the gate open.

As she drove off the bridge Race pulled out a hundred, gave it to her. "Couldn't pay it sooner," he chuckled. "Might have ruined your story. That's a new one, charging relatives for a visit. Guess if he had a mother-in-law he'd charge her a thousand."

"It isn't funny. It's outrageous. I'll give him a piece of my mind."

The car rolled up a winding driveway bordered by dense shrubbery, followed the concrete in a U turn around the huge, castlelike house, halted under a wide arch. Lights came on, a big man in butler's uniform stepped out, opened the car door.

"I'm Janice Darrow" the girl said. "This is my chauffeur."

"Yes, Miss Darrow. The other relatives are waiting."

They were shown to a huge room that reminded Race of a theater. At one end was a pipe organ. There was a billiard table, slot machine, archery target, bar, and a fountain in the center. Easy chairs covered with bear skins. A huge divan made of cedar and polar bear skins. Race wouldn't have been surprised to have found a calliope in one corner.

Grouped about were the relatives. Race counted twelve men and seven women. Not one seemed to recognize Janice Darrow. Race looked at her, saw her glance fastened on a ten-foot-square, gold-and-silver motto in the middle of the ceiling. He read the lettering in mingled surprise and amusement:

This Is My Home And I Do As I Damn Please.

The floors were solid mahogany, the walls a checkerboard pattern of cedar and mahogany. At the far end was a fireplace fully twenty feet wide. It was piled high with logs. He was looking at a trapeze swung above the big divan when the corner of his eye caught the opening of a door. A medium-sized man with thick black hair and square face, walked into the room.

Clad in corduroy pants, sport shirt, and moccasins, he walked to the fountain. "Good evening, relatives," he called, his roving eyes going from person to person. "I've never seen most of you before, neither have you seen me. I'm Roger Leymore. Now that Janice Darrow has arrived we'll get down to business."

He paused to grin at the amazed faces. "First, I reckon all of you are hungry. All the kitchen servants are on vacation"—chuckling in amusement—"so you'll have to fix your own grub."

"The kitchen, cold storage room, and grub are in the back. Work it any way you choose. I'd suggest you detail sev-

eral of the ladies to fix the eats. As for mine"—a crashing roll of thunder shook the house; he cocked his head to listen—"for mine you can sizzle me a hunk of steak. When everyone is full I'll tell you why you're here. Can anyone present play a pipe organ? My librarian doubles in organ punching, but he's vacationing."

Nobody admitted being an organist. Race studied the expressions of amazement on faces. "Some of these people would give another hundred to be back home," he whispered to Janice Darrow and grinned.

The women made a picnic of serving dinner. They became acquainted in the process. The men knew each other by the time their appetites were appeased. Race realized with relief that he'd been accepted as a relative, few of whom knew each other.

A middle-aged widow, a Mrs. Dockery, insisted on preparing Roger Leymore's place and serving it in person. She won a grunted "Thank you," but nothing else. When the dishes were cleared away, the butler asked for silence. Roger Leymore stood up, lit a cigar, began talking:

"You perhaps wonder why I asked you folks here. There's no mystery about it. I just wanted to look my relatives over before making my will. It won't do you any good to act and try to fool me. I'm hard to fool.

"There are forty rooms in this dump. I want each of you to occupy a room separately. I might want to drop in for a chat. I'm going to give you just one test; a question to be answered in as few words as possible. The question: 'What would you do with a million dollars?' Have your answer ready by tomorrow afternoon. Now—how many of you men can play poker?"

THE driving rain didn't let up through the entire night. Terrific claps of thunder rattled windows. Race slept fitfully and rose early. Seeing a lull in the downpour, he dressed and slipped out for a look at the island.

The house was on the highest spot of the island, which was long and narrow. Hearing the roar of the swelling river, he started toward the bridge for a look. He paused as his eyes caught sight of what looked like a kid glove on a pile of brush and dirt. His curiosity aroused,

he walked over to the spot, halted with narrowed eyes. What he had taken for a glove was a man's hand.

A bit of work and he gazed down at the dead body of a middle-aged man clad in a guard's uniform. The jacket breast was blood-soaked. *Bullet through the heart*, mused Race after baring the chest. *Couldn't have killed himself and buried his own body*. He went through the pockets, found nothing.

He studied the spot carefully. There were no shoeprints except his own. No trail proving the body had been dragged to the shallow grave. Then his roving eyes caught sight of a tire track. He stooped to examine it. The sudden stoop saved his life.

He heard the whine of the bullet first, then the report. Alert to his danger he threw his body in a rolling dive over a hummock, reached the shelter of shrubbery. Gaining his feet, he raced for the house. He had no desire to face an armed foe just then; his own weapon was in his bag.

He went to his room. With his pistol holstered under his left armpit, he went down to report the killing to Roger Leymore. He found Leymore's room locked, so he hurried to the phone in the big reception room, thumbd the directory.

He was about to place his call to the sheriff when the scowling butler walked up, banked the receiver back down. "Using the telephone is against Mr. Leymore's orders," he snapped. "Who you fixing to call, anyway?"

Race studied the man's cold eyes, suppressed an angry retort. "Well, it doesn't matter," he said lightly. "Was only phoning my barber to send me some hair tonic. Say, do you think my hair really needs a tonic?"

He stepped back a pace, feeling the man might attack him. "A smart guy, eh," snarled the butler. "Don't gimme any of your lip or I'll—" He didn't finish. A roaring crash sounded from outside. The rush of thundering water raised a deafening noise. They heard a man's shouts.

Hurrying to a window, Race could see nothing for dense shrubbery. Shouts of an approaching man grew louder. The butler was at the opened door. Race joined him; could now see the rising waters. The soaked figure of a man came into view.

"The bridge's gone!" he yelled. "Water's coming up! Must be a cloudburst!" Race recognized the man as the guard who had admitted Janice Darrow's car.

The butler turned and went up the stairs. Race heard him pounding on Roger Leymore's door. "Better git up, Mr. Leymore! Bridge's washed out. The water's coming up to the house."

Race heard other doors open, heard the frightened inquiries of women. He looked at the tall guard. "How did you manage to get across from the far end of the bridge before the thing went down?" he asked.

The man looked startled. "Hell, I saw the flood coming and ran like the devil. There was a wall of water twenty foot high." Race seemed to lose interest, turned away.

The men were coming downstairs. Janice Darrow was the first of the women; following her was the widow, Mrs. Dockery. The butler pounded again on Leymore's door; got no response. The tall guard pulled off his slicker.

Race said to him, "I thought I heard a shot. Must have been your shot warning of the coming flood."

He scowled at Race. "You're dreaming, Mister. I didn't shoot no shot and was too busy running even if I'd wanted to."

Janice Darrow asked, "Is there any danger of the flood reaching the house?"

"I hope not," Race replied. He heard the butler pounding harder on Leymore's door. "Must be a sound sleeper," Race whispered to the girl.

A watery-eyed man with half-moon hair removed his eyeglasses, addressed Janice Darrow, "I noticed the driveway sloped from the river to the house. I hardly think the flood will get into the house." Race recalled the man had been introduced as Dr. Lathan.

"Doctor, suppose we step out and see how fast the water's rising," he suggested.

Dr. Lathan liked the idea. They went out and Race led the way toward the shallow grave. Reaching the spot he saw the water swirling about twenty feet from it. But the body was no longer there.

The doctor wanted to observe other points, but Race had lost interest. They returned to the house, found the occupants wondering about Roger Leymore's

continued absence. Another five minutes passed before Leymore's door opened. He was fully dressed. He paused to light a cigar, then came down the steps.

"There's no cause for alarm," he called out. "House's too high up for the river to reach. The important thing is—what're we going to have for breakfast?"

CHAPTER II

RACE was standing near the fountain with Donald Wisey, his wife and their daughter, Millie, when Mrs. Dockery came by carrying a huge tray of food for Roger Leymore. When she returned from upstairs, she said to Mrs. Wisey:

"The man must be a glutton. He ordered enough breakfast to feed an elephant."

Breakfast over, Race went up to his room. His bag was on the bed; he had left it on a cedar stand. The contents had been removed, dumped back in carelessly. Race grinned. If the prowler had been hunting something identifying the owner he had been disappointed. The false bottom had been unobserved, Race noted with relief.

Race sauntered into the library and was amazed at the expanse and completeness. Bookcases lined the walls from floor to ceiling. Special racks were loaded with magazines. He found a magazine article on Leymore's life; settled down in an easy chair at a window to read.

He was half through the story when he heard the door open and close. Himself hidden by the high back of his chair, he started to rise when he recognized the voice of the butler:

"It didn't work. Leymore wouldn't tell where it was."

"We got ways of making him tell," another voice snarled in low tones. Race recognized the tall guard's voice. "A few cigarettes against his feet, he'd talk plenty."

"That's out. He'd talk plenty afterwards to the police. He mustn't know we—" The door opened again. The butler and guard went out. Race rose, yawned, and went to a window.

Watching the flood, he said thoughtfully to himself, *Race, old boy, you've got*

a job cut out for you. That Darrow girl needs no protection; you're the guy who needs it. You paid a hundred bucks to get into a screwy mess. You find a body, get shot at, return to the body, and find it gone. So what? You hear the butler and guard cussing because Leymore wouldn't tell 'em where something is. Where what is?

"A penny for your thoughts, Mr. Bennett." Race whirled, looked into the smiling face of Janice Darrow. "Oh, I'm sorry if I startled you."

Race grinned. "Say, have you noticed there's not a picture of Roger Leymore to be seen? Funny, don't you think?"

She looked thoughtful. "Now that you mention it, it does seem odd. I've never seen a picture of him. But I had heard Mother describe him so many times I recognized him instantly."

"Have you written your answer to the million dollar question?"

She raised her brows. "Oh, yes." She left him and sauntered away.

Gradually the water rose until at one point it lapped against the house foundation. This alarmed several of the women, and they held a little anxiety meeting. As a result Mrs. Dockery went over to the billiard table where a game was in progress. "Mr. Leymore, we ladies think you should phone for help. The water is at the house."

Leymore made his shot, missed. "Go right ahead and phone, if it'll relieve your fears."

Mrs. Dockery looked at the men, selected the butler for the chore. "Please phone somewhere for help."

The butler looked displeased. "Who'll I phone, lady?"

"You won't phone anyone," Race said. "You've evidently forgotten the telephone line crossed the river on the bridge."

The butler snapped his fingers. "Sure it did. That's out, lady. Have to send some other way."

Mrs. Dockery looked distressed. "But how?"

Race winked at Dr. Lathan. "You might use a messenger pigeon, Mrs. Dockery." She gave him a get-in-the-corner look, turned her back.

Race selected a seat and studied Roger Leymore. The man didn't fit any type he had prepared for him. Leymore had battled and won against tremendous

odds, emerging toughened and cantankerous. After ignoring and disdaining his relatives for years, he now had called them together. For what? To look them over before making his will, so he had said. But the man acted like he had assembled them for a loneliness cure. Leymore was enjoying them immensely.

Janice Darrow asked Race to go see the kitchen and cold storage room. He went with her. "It's the most marvelous kitchen I ever hope to see, Mr. Bennett. It simply has everything. But that cold storage room gives me the creeps. Reminds me of a morgue."

He agreed with her about the kitchen. She opened the thick door of the ice room. Carcasses of lamb, beef, porkers, and fowls hung in it. One huge carcass puzzled Race.

"It's bear," she whispered, and Race recalled a statement in the magazine story. Leymore was fond of bear meat.

IT WAS mid-afternoon before Leymore called in the answers to his million dollar question. He rolled the papers together, thrust them in his pocket. "Look at 'em later," he announced.

Race went into the library and read the rest of the magazine story about Leymore. When he came out, the water had stopped rising but showed no signs of falling. The news brought much relief to the women. Mrs. Dockery was asking the proper way to cook bear meat. Leymore had put in his order for it.

Someone suggested bridge and Race played until late. When he sought his bed his wrist watch said it was fifteen after twelve. It seemed he had hardly closed his eyes before he heard a shot, muffled, but a shot just the same. He snapped on the light, looked at his watch. It was five after two. The shot had sounded not so far away.

Slipping into pants, shirt, and sneakers, he went into the hall. A door two rooms away opened. Dr. Lathan looked out. "I thought I heard a shot, Mr. Bennett. Sounded quite close."

Other doors opened. Frightened whispers of women were heard. The butler came up the stairs, switched on the lights. The door of a room five doors away opened. A thin man called out excitedly:

"It was in the room next to mine."

"That's Slim's room!" The butler hur-

ried forward. Race kept pace with him. Before they reached the door it was opened from the inside. A medium-sized man, thin-faced, with thinning hair, stepped out. He wore a bathrobe.

"William Wadlow," Race heard a man exclaim. He pushed ahead of the butler, entered the lighted room. Lying on the floor was the body of the tall guard, trickles of blood fanning out from under the body. Lying nearby was a pistol.

The butler gave one look, mouthed an oath. "That rat killed Slim. Probably trying to rob him."

Dr. Lathan came into the room, knelt beside the body, turned it over.

He looked at Race. "This man is dead. A bullet through his heart killed him." At the door Wadlow—one of the relatives—looked at the doctor, fear in his eyes. Race got out his handkerchief, picked up the weapon by the barrel end. A number of men crowded into the room. A woman peered in from the door, screamed and left hurriedly.

Race held the weapon up, looked questioningly about. "It ain't Slim's," the butler growled. Race's eyes roved from face to face. Negative nods greeted him. His gaze fastened on Wadlow's face.

The man started, stepped forward, and peered closely at the gun. "It's — that's my gun," he said hoarsely. "I didn't kill him. You needn't look at me that way."

Race deftly examined the gun. "It was fired once. Suppose, Mr. Wadlow, you tell us. If you didn't kill him, what brought you into this room and how your pistol fired the fatal shot."

Wadlow looked about at the grim faces, shuddered a bit, licked his lips. "When I went to my room to go to bed, I found a note on my pillow." He searched the pockets of the bathrobe.

"I remember now. I left the note in my vest pocket. Anyway, it told me to come to this room at two o'clock. Said the writer had some extremely important news for me. It warned me to keep mum and to be there promptly. It was signed, 'A Friend'."

Race nodded. "What happened when you came here?"

Wadlow pulled nervously at his ear. "I knocked on the door. Softly at first, then louder. I heard him"—pointing at the body—"get up and unlock the door. I walked in. I heard a gun go off behind me, and started to turn. Something hit

my head, and everything went black. When I came to, I was on the floor. I got up and saw his body there. I opened the door and met you fellows coming in."

The men exchanged looks. Race looked at Dr. Lathan. "Okay, Wadlow, you say you left the note in your vest pocket. We'll go to your room and you can show it to us." His eyes caught sight of something behind a footstool. He stepped over, picked up a heavy, brass candlestick. Putting it on the table, he said, "Lead us to your room, Wadlow."

In his own room Wadlow fished in his vest pocket, hastily fished through the others. "It's gone." He searched through his suit, his light topcoat. Shook his head hopelessly. "It's no use, it disappeared."

"Knewed you was lying," the butler snarled. "You went to Slim's room to rob him; he woke up and hit you with the candlestick, so you shot him."

"I think," Race said dryly, "we better lock this man up until we can get word to the sheriff." Heads nodded approval. Wadlow looked stunned.

"Why not lock him in his room?" Race said. "He can't escape with this flood on." Heads nodded again.

Back in his own room Race wrapped the pistol up, hid it in a big vase. He got out his own weapon, put it under his pillow. Two men had been put away with two bullets. He didn't intend being the third. He looked to the door, peered through the three windows of the room. As far as he could see, a cat couldn't get a foothold outside those windows.

He crawled in bed and wasted no time trying to puzzle out a clue to what had happened. He was asleep in less than three minutes.

NEXT morning a rap on his door by Dr. Lathan awakened Race. He ushered the doctor in. "Mr. Bennett, doesn't it strike you as odd that everyone in the household knew about the killing last night except Mr. Leymore?"

Race considered that a few moments. "Not so odd, doctor. His room is at the far end of the house. Nobody thought to arouse him. But he should be told at once."

"That has been done. The butler and I gave him the facts. He thinks Wadlow is guilty without any doubt; told us a streak of insanity ran through Wadlow's family. He instructed the butler and me

to go through the dead man's effects and turn everything over to the butler; said he would find the poor fellow's nearest kin and would handle it accordingly."

Race nodded, buttoned his shirt. Dr. Lathan coughed nervously. "We found a thousand dollars in cash and checks in his bag. The checks were made out to 'Cash'. One was my own check given the guard at the bridge. I asked the butler about the body. He told us to wrap it up, put it in an inconspicuous corner of the cold storage room, and conceal it so the women would be unaware it was there. We did that. We were fortunately able to do so before any of the women stirred."

Race knotted his tie, donned his vest and coat. Dr. Lathan cleared his throat. "Back home I'm the county physician. In this case we are unable to notify the proper authorities." He shot Race a keen glance. "Any further investigation can be handled by you, quite capably, I am sure."

"Thank you, doctor. I shall do my best."

When the butler carried breakfast to Wadlow, Race went along. The man looked like he hadn't slept, and didn't touch the food. Race asked:

"Wadlow, why didn't you grab the cash the guard had after you killed him?"

"I didn't kill him," Wadlow said sullenly.

"Nuts! I'll tell you why. You didn't have time. You popped yourself on the head with that candlestick for an alibi in case the murder was traced to you. The guard couldn't have done it; he was already dead. But you popped yourself too hard; the blow stunned you. When you recovered you heard doors opening. You forgot the loot, thought only of getting clear." The butler nodded agreeably.

"I didn't kill him!" shouted Wadlow furiously.

"Nuts! Call us when you're ready to confess." Race left the room.

The butler followed, grasped Race's arm. "Say, mister, you ought to be a dick. You got brains. I never thought about that bozo conking himself with the candlestick." He grinned. "Say—you ain't a dick?"

Race beamed. "I've always wanted to be. Maybe I will after this. You really

think I could be?" The butler nodded sagely. Race looked about cautiously. "I'll tell you. I found the body of the other guard outside. Somebody shot at me. When I went back, the body had been removed. You know what I think?"

He lowered his voice. "This Wadlow killed that guard. Wadlow's a nut. Been in a bughouse and hates guards. Saw me and took a shot at me. Keep this under your hat, just between you and me, see?" The butler nodded eagerly, flashed Race a condescending look as he left.

Race stood at a window for some little time, gazing vacantly at the water. Some things added up; some didn't. He wasn't sure just what his next step should be. Why hadn't Leymore missed the guard in uniform? Or, if he had, why hadn't he asked about him? What kind of man was Leymore, anyway? Was eccentric the right word? The more he considered Leymore the more he wanted a closer seat.

He went to the kitchen where the women were already preparing the mid-day meal. He asked Mrs. Dockery, "Do me a favor, please. Let me carry Mr. Leymore's tray to his room."

"Do me a favor you mean, Mr. Bennett. The man's a glutton. I can hardly carry all his food. Certainly. I'll send for you when it's ready."

He went into the library, followed by Janice Darrow. "Mr. Bennett, isn't it terrible? Just think. I had a long conversation with Mr. Wadlow last evening." She shuddered. "He might have killed me."

Race repressed a smile. "You're in no danger. Wadlow is locked in his room."

He was still in the library when Mrs. Dockery sent for him. He was astonished at the amount of food on the tray. It was heaped with meat, bear and beef steaks. He had to set it down before he could rap on Leymore's door.

He heard a key turn in the lock; the door swung open. Leymore looked surprised. Race set the tray down, turned. "Mr. Leymore, I've been surprised you didn't remember me. Don't you recall last summer? Don't you remember the two days I was your guest here?"

Leymore got hold of himself. "Of course. It's clear now. To tell you the truth, I did remember you." He grinned. "I didn't want to let the other relatives know, wanted to show no favoritism

whatever. Odd I can't recall your name, Mr.—"

"Bennett—R. W. Bennett," Race said casually.

"Of course, Mr. Bennett. You must pardon my absence of mind. Now, if you don't mind, one of my oddities is eating alone. Perhaps I got it honestly. I ate alone so many years, you know."

Race went to the library, selected a magazine, turned to the story about Leymore. He turned several pages till he found the paragraph he sought, read:

Roger Leymore might be called a recluse; perhaps a better way of putting it would be to say he is decidedly uncomfortable in a crowd, even a small group. Perhaps he doesn't want to file any more faces or names in his amazingly retentive mind; for the man was never known to forget a face or a name.

Race lit a cigarette, grinned, said to himself, "Maybe he did dream I came to see him and never forgets a dream either."

CHAPTER III

RACE called Janice Darrow aside. "Miss Darrow, I want you to do me a small favor."

"Why certainly, Mr. Bennett." The girl looked curious. "What can it be?"

"Look." Race lowered his voice. "I want you to get hold of the butler; keep him away from his room for thirty minutes, even if you have to faint in his arms."

Her eyes danced excitedly. "I'll do it. When? Right now?"

Race nodded and sauntered away.

When he saw her call the butler aside, he looked at his watch, slipped away and up the stairs. Reaching the butler's room, he pulled out a bunch of keys. He was lucky. The third key did the work. Inside he relocked the door and went to work.

Twenty minutes, and he had found exactly nothing. He was about to give it up when he spied an old hat crushed under a pile of dirty clothes. Under the inside band he found a torn fragment of newspaper clipping. It read:

Now that Buckey is out and free to circulate without danger of a heavy hand falling on his shoulder, it remains to be seen whether he will tread the straight and narrow. Perhaps he has at last learned his lesson. Or

perhaps he used his cunning mind in prison to cook up some new schemes to fleece the unwary. Certain it is he promised to go straight. Promising to reform is an old Buckey habit.

That was all. Race slipped from the room, made his way unobtrusively down the stairs. Who was Buckey? The entire clipping might have given the answer. The fragment only sweetened the puzzle. Or did it put the finger on the butler? Who else but Buckey himself would be interested enough to hide the clipping in his hatband? Anyway, things were beginning to shape up.

If Buckey was the butler, the tall guard had been his buddy. What was it Leymore had refused to tell the butler? What could it be but the location of Leymore's secret vault or safe? What else would Buckey be interested in finding? Race could think of nothing else.

But wait. If the butler was Buckey, how was he fooling Leymore? How else could he fool him except by posing as an experienced butler and getting Leymore to hire him? In that case, what had happened to the old butler? Or had there been a butler before this one? Race didn't know, and didn't know anyone to ask except Leymore and that was out.

Maybe the answer could be found in Leymore's room, and maybe it couldn't. Anyway, it wouldn't hurt to take a look. He again called on Janice Darrow. "Miss Darrow, you're the only one I can press into service."

"Whose room is it this time?" she asked mischievously.

"Roger Leymore's."

The girl looked startled.

"Get hold of him. Hold him thirty minutes. Can you do it?"

She nodded eagerly.

"Okay. When I see you talking to him, I'll go into action."

He had a two hour wait. Finally he saw the girl call to Leymore, saw the two start chatting. He slipped up the stairs to Leymore's room. He tried several keys before the door opened; then he slipped inside and relocked the door.

Easy chairs, bearskin rugs, bed in corner, big fireplace at one end. Race started with the desk. Five minutes and nothing of interest. He heard footsteps outside, a key grating in the lock. He slipped under the bed. The coverlet

draped to the floor, and he was safely hidden.

The door was opened and relocked. Suddenly the floor began rising upward; the part Race's legs reposed on tilted downward. Startled, he grabbed the bed frame and held on. The see-saw movement was noiseless, but below he thought he recognized the faint hum of an electric motor.

Now he heard steps descending stairs under the bed. The bed came back down with the portion of floor. He lay motionless a moment, slipped from under. He unlocked the door, relocked it from the outside, walked casually away and down the stairs.

So Roger Leymore slept on the door of his secret vault. Quite cleverly hidden. He wished he had peeped out and found out where Leymore had pressed the switch. Maybe the answer to this Buckey business was in the vault.

Janice Darrow looked relieved at sight of him. "I couldn't hold him," she said. "All of a sudden he just turned and left. Did you make it out of his room?" Race nodded. "Oh, I nearly forgot. The butler is looking for you."

He found the butler. That individual led him to a quiet corner. "I've been thinking about what you said about wanting to be a dick." Race looked interested. "I thought I'd give you a little lesson, if you're interested."

Race said eagerly, "You bet I am. Spill it."

The butler grinned smugly. "Mr. Leymore has a secret safe somewhere in this dump. Nobody but him and me knows how to find it. I ain't going to give you a tip on finding it. Try your hand at locating it. If you can, you're fit to be a real dick."

"Watch me," Race said gravely. "And listen—if you find me under your bed, don't get sore; I'll be looking for that safe."

It was a break for Race. Now he could prowl over the house unsuspected. If anyone got nasty he could call the butler and receive clearance papers.

The flood was holding its own after reaching a peak. Race wondered about the body of the guard. Had flood waters carried it away or had the slayer hidden it elsewhere?

He went to his room, flopped on the bed for a short rest. His roving eyes

noticed the big vase in which he had hidden Wadlow's pistol; it had been moved slightly. He jumped up, looked in it. The pistol was no longer there.

HE WALKED over to a similar vase. The pistol was inside. He frowned. Had he or had he not been mistaken in vases? He decided he had not. But why would some intruder slip into his room merely to move a pistol from one vase to another? He didn't know, and he didn't have a crystal ball. He dismissed it from his thoughts.

He relieved his mind of two dead bodies, Buckey, a see-saw bed and other teasers by playing bridge. His watch said it was forty minutes after twelve when he sought his room.

He had removed his coat and vest, turned to the bed to deposit his gun under the pillow, when he heard a slight noise like a smoothly fitted window opening. He dropped instantly to the floor, twisting his body over with the same motion. Not a second too soon. The roar of a pistol shot filled the room. From a panel in the wall the head and right arm of a man protruded. The hand held a pistol. The man was Roger Leymore.

Before Race could recover from his astonishment, Leymore disappeared and the panel slid back into place. Race leaped up, tried to reopen the panel, but couldn't budge it. Had Leymore blown his top and gone gunning for human game? If so, why had he picked on Race? Or had Leymore been nuts all along and invited his relatives here to murder them?

He heard doors opening, footsteps outside. Someone pounded on his door. "Mr. Bennett! Mr. Bennett, are you hurt?" He recognized Dr. Lathan's voice.

He opened the door and grinned at worried faces in the doorway. "I was just examining my gun and it went off," he explained. "Quite stupid of me. Sorry to arouse the household." Dr. Lathan looked like he didn't swallow it. The others trooped back to their rooms.

Dr. Lathan looked significantly at Pace. "Be careful, Bennett. If a gun goes off in here again, be sure it isn't pointed at you." He left the room.

Race kept his eyes on the panel, gun in hand. He began adding several things together, things that had been theories evolving from mere suspicions. He had

suspected hidden panels; they tied in with other things he was learning about Leymore.

A light rap on his door. He unlocked it, posted himself well to one side, taking no chances. "Come in," he invited. The butler entered. Race shut the door, locked it.

The butler noticed that. "So you always keep your door locked, do you, Bennett?" The butler walked over to the windows. "The bullet didn't come through them. Look, was your door locked when that shot was fired?"

Race saw no reason for denying a fact the fellow already knew. "Sure it was."

The butler looked at the bullet hole in the wall. "Where was you standing?" Race showed him. The fellow lined himself up with the bullet hole, looked at Race queerly. "Look, if you was standing here, the bullet couldn't of come from the door or windows. Where did it come from?"

It was a question Race couldn't very well parry. He was a bit mystified. The question the butler should have asked—who had shot at him—he hadn't asked. Instead he was asking questions Race figured he would naturally not ask. He decided on a sudden hunch to tell the truth about the panel, but to make the fellow ask the identity of his assailant.

He told about seeing the panel slide shut, then added the words, "A man's head and right arm were sticking through the opening."

The butler looked startled. A wicked gleam crept into his eyes. "So that's it. One of them panel tricks, huh? Say, how'd the shot miss you?"

"I heard the panel opening and dropped to the floor."

The butler pondered that. "So if a guy was not to hear the panel—if you hadn't heard it, you'd be a dead chicken, huh?" He turned to the door. "Well, I got to be going."

Race let him out, relocked the door.

Race stood there, turning things over in his mind. He had been careful to not tell the butler it was Leymore who had shot at him. Yet the fellow hadn't asked, hadn't even been interested in the identity of his assailant. What did that add up to? He decided it meant the butler knew Leymore had tried to kill him, but didn't know about secret panels. No man in his right senses would have failed to

ask who the assailant was after being prompted to do so, Race decided, unless he already knew.

So what? If the fellow was already in the know, that meant Race hadn't fooled him. Maybe he had persuaded Leymore to kill him. Maybe he had told Leymore that Race was out to murder him. That added, but not to the answer his theories were pointing to.

He didn't want to stand guard all night over that panel. His eyes lit on a huge chest-of-drawers, big enough to cover the panel. He worked it over. If that nut, Leymore, returned he'd be checkmated, at least long enough for Race to be awakened.

He stood there ten minutes before he convinced himself the piece of furniture was a capable guard and turned to undress and get some sleep.

RACE was awakened by what sounded like a muffled shot. His wrist watch told him it was ten after four. Throwing his clothes on hurriedly and not forgetting his pistol, he slipped outside; stood there trying to determine where the shot had come from. He decided it must have been from the far end of the house, in the region of Leymore's room.

He knocked on a door four doors from Leymore's room. It was opened by a wizened little man, baldish and nervous looking. Race remembered him as Sam Unlaw. "Did you hear a shot, Mr. Unlaw?"

"Yes, I did." He pointed toward Leymore's room. "It sounded like it came from there. There's nobody in the rooms between us."

He followed as Race walked on and rapped at Leymore's door, rapped several times. Race selected the key he had used before, unlocked the door. Followed by Unlaw, he walked inside. Lying on the floor, fully dressed, was the body of Roger Leymore. He lay face down, arms outstretched.

Unlaw stood as if in a trance. "Go and tell Dr. Lathan to hurry here," Race said, pushing the man to the door. Unlaw left on his errand. Race knew Leymore was dead. He looked at the hands, parted the hair and examined the left side of the head. Turned his attention to the bed. Pulling a pistol from under the pillow, he saw one shot had been fired from it.

Shutting the door, he began going over the walls, seeking the switch which would tip up the bed. He couldn't locate it. He heard footsteps approaching, opened the door. Dr. Lathan entered, followed by Unlaw and several men. Beyond a narrowing of his eyes, Dr. Lathan betrayed no emotion. Kneeling beside the body he made a hasty examination, turned the body over.

"This man is dead. Killed by a bullet through his heart."

Race nodded. "Doctor, will you see that every male in the house is aroused and assembled in the reception room?" Dr. Lathan nodded. Race added, "And let me know when all are there."

When the room was clear, he shut the door, went to work again. He moved pictures, furniture, rugs. He tried the sides, back and bottom of the fireplace. Wherever that switch was, it was cleverly hidden. He finally had to stand back and admit he was stumped. The murder of the man on the floor, he felt, was the link which gave conclusive weight to his theory—fantastic as it had seemed at first.

He heaved a sigh, started another search for that switch, comforted by the thought that if he didn't know its location, no one else did. He boiled with frustration.

Dr. Lathan opened the door. "All the men are assembled except the butler. He wasn't in his room."

Race didn't look surprised. "He must be found, doctor."

The doctor looked at the body. "You think he—"

"I think not a one of us will be safe as long as he roams this house. I suggest we divide the men into squads to go over the house. There's no time to lose. It may mean the snuffing out of another life."

They went down to the reception room, and the search got under way. Race went to his own room. Unlocking the door, he stepped inside, froze with surprise. The big piece of furniture had been pulled aside. The blade of an axe had hewn a gaping hole through the panel. The axe lay on the floor.

Pistol in hand, eyes never straying from the hole, he relocked the door. Taking a flashlight from his bag he poked it through the panel, sent the spray of light up and down the narrow passage-way. He squeezed his body through the

opening, chose the route toward Leymore's room and set out.

The spray of light picked up no sign of the butler. Leymore's was a corner room. Race arrived there and quickly located the panel opening into it. Unfastening the spring catch he slid it open. The body hadn't been disturbed, the door was shut.

Closing and fastening the panel, he retraced his steps to his own room, set out in the opposite direction. There were no signs of the butler. A bit mystified, he crawled into his room, hurried to the big reception hall. Janice Darrow was there with Dr. Lathan.

"No sign of him yet," the doctor said. "We're still searching."

"Keep it up." Race started for Leymore's room, called back, "See that the searchers are armed."

Back in Leymore's chamber, Race locked the door, started another hunt for the switch. He was lucky. His toe scraped against a hard object inches from the bed leg. Lifting the bearskin rug he found the switch. Working it, he heard a whirring noise from below. The bed tilted upward, exposing a narrow stairway.

Weapon in readiness, he descended and found himself facing a heavy door barring entrance to a concrete chamber. The bed slid back down into place. Pulling out his keys he attacked the door lock. The fifth key did the work.

Turning the knob noiselessly he kicked the door open, pressing his body to one side. After a few moments' wait he slid catlike through the door—to suddenly stiffen in surprise. His pistol hand dropped to his side. One glance told him the theory he had been working on was quite correct. In that room was the answer to most of the teasers he'd been wrestling with.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Race presently emerged from Leymore's room, locked the door, and started downstairs, his jaw was set grimly. Another surprise awaited him. The butler stood nonchalantly in the reception room, puffing on a cigar. Dr. Lathan glanced at his watch.

"You were gone quite a time, Bennett. The butler walked in the front door, said he'd been outside looking at the flood."

Race asked quickly, "Where's his gun?"

"He was unarmed. We searched his room. No sign of it."

Race didn't seem surprised. He noticed all the women were present as well as the men. Only Wadlow was missing. "Doctor, have two of the men bring Mr. Wadlow down."

Dr. Lathan looked mystified, but obeyed. They quickly returned with Wadlow.

Race lit a cigarette, looked at Wadlow. "Mr. Wadlow did not kill the tall guard—I never learned his name." He looked at the butler. "Nor yours—what is it, anyway?"

"Jimmy Benson." The butler curled his lips. "Why?"

Race ignored the query. He told how he had found the body of the uniformed guard. Several of the women gasped. Race smiled grimly.

"I am a private detective. I was retained by Miss Darrow to accompany her for protection. She, it seems, was the only one of the relatives to smell a mouse. Roger Leymore invited you folks here so he could appraise you and make his will accordingly. Maybe it was unorthodox, but it suited his whim. What he didn't figure on was the play being taken from his hands."

Race jerked his thumb at the butler. "This man—Jimmy Benson isn't his real name—and his pal, the tall guard, got wind of the affair. They waited till Leymore's servants had been sent away—another prank of Leymore's—then moved in. They had to kill the bridge guard.

"In some way they forced Leymore to play their game. But Benson's pal stopped a bullet. Wadlow's story was quite true. I swallowed it to suck Benson in on a fake play. He swallowed it at first.

"But when Leymore poked his head through a secret panel in my room and took a shot at me, Benson added two and two and got the right answer. If Leymore could do that to me, why couldn't he do it to Benson's chum? He did. First snitching Wadlow's gun to kill the fellow with. Wadlow told exactly how it happened. Leymore drew him there with the note, slid the panel open, killed the guard, and hit Wadlow with the heavy candlestick. So much for that."

He looked at Benson. "Benson knew

Leymore was out to get him. He killed Leymore—"

"That's a lie," snarled Benson. "Where's your proof?"

"He killed Leymore," Race reiterated, "but failed to find the secret of the panels. He got an axe and opened the panel in my room. But he still couldn't find what he sought."

Race grinned at the scowling butler. "He and his pal had heard that Leymore kept a fortune in a secret vault here. But they couldn't find it and Leymore refused to open up."

Benson laughed sneeringly. "A real dick, are you? You can't be or you'd know you got to have evidence. You got nothing on me."

Race stared at him. "Since you deny killing Leymore, have you any objection to accompanying us to the body upstairs, gazing on it, and repeating your denial?"

Some color drained from Benson's face. He got hold of himself with an effort. "Of course I ain't. I didn't kill him and got nothing to be afraid of."

THE butler between them, Race and Dr. Lathan led the way upstairs. Race unlocked the door. All the relatives crowded into the big room in a circle around the body.

Benson's face looked waxy. Race looked at him grimly. "Did you, or did you not, kill this man?"

Benson licked his lips. "I didn't—I didn't have nothing to do with—" He broke off his words, his eyes bulging in terror. The right arm of the body on the floor was raising. Women screamed in terror.

The arm raised slowly upward till the index finger of the hand pointed at Benson. "Stop it! Take me outa here! I killed him," quavered Benson. "Lemme outa here—that man ain't Leymore." Turning weakly, covering his face with his hands, he staggered toward the door.

At a sign from Race, two of the men grasped his arms, held him. "You can get up now, Mr. Leymore," chuckled Race. Roger Leymore opened his eyes, laughed at the amazed expressions, got to his feet.

"It worked, Bennett," he chuckled. "That's the most fun I've had since I was a kid."

"I better explain before someone else faints," Race said. He pulled up the cov-

erlet flowing from the bed. A woman let out a little scream as he and Leymore pulled the body out to view. Gasps went up. The dead man was a double for Roger Leymore.

"This dead man is a crook named Buckey," Race said. "He's been masquerading as Roger Leymore while Mr. Leymore has been imprisoned in a secret room. Look." He pressed the switch, the bed tilted upwards.

"This stairway leads to the room. I found it while you folks were searching for Benson. Mr. Leymore and I framed up the little macabre scene you just witnessed. I had no real proof on Benson and needed a confession. It worked nicely."

He grinned at the relieved expressions. "When Mr. Leymore concocted his little prank of asking his relatives here, he decided to do some retouching. He inserted a want ad for a man, preferably a former actor, who could use the art of makeup and double for him. His idea was to remain out of sight and enjoy the fun. Unfortunately, and also unexpectedly, Buckey and two of his pals saw a chance to exploit the ad to their own gain, the more so when Buckey realized he already resembled Mr. Leymore. Not that it mattered. None of you relatives had ever seen Leymore anyway.

"Buckey posed as an actor out of work, landed the job. Their scheme was to loot Leymore's vault, tie him up, and depart. Two things upset their apperception: the flood and Leymore's refusal to tell Buckey the location of his vault. But Buckey, ever alert for bigger profit, and never unwilling to double-cross a pal, decided to play for the whole pot. He set out to rid himself of his two partners by the simple expedient of murder.

"He knew the secret of the room under the bed. Leymore hid there while Buckey fed him and brought him the news. The cunning Buckey kept this secret from his pals. He tied up Mr. Leymore in the secret room, killed one of his confederates but was himself killed by Benson.

"If he had rid himself of Benson, he would have killed Leymore, dismissed the relatives and passed himself off as Leymore. The chances of success were

good. But several little things tripped him. He got on to me and tried to kill me before Benson. That led to Benson seeing his game."

Dr. Lathan smiled ruefully. "And I was quite taken in by the man. What caused you to see through him, Bennett?"

"First, the little stingaree his two pals put on us by collecting a hundred bucks at the bridge. Leymore is a wealthy man. He would never have countenanced that. Then the body of Leymore's real guard. I read up on Roger Leymore. He hated rings, never wore one. Buckey had a big one on his finger. Leymore never forgot a face. I tripped Buckey on that. Lastly, Leymore has a scar on the left side of his head. Buckey did not. That was the clincher."

"I suggest," Roger Leymore said, "that we move back downstairs. I haven't had any breakfast."

He turned from the window. "The flood is receding fast. I have a motorboat, safe and dry, which I didn't tell Buckey about." He pulled a roll of papers from his coat pocket. "You will recall I asked each relative to answer the question, 'What would you do with a million dollars?' I have read the answers with much enjoyment."

He looked around, chuckling. "One answer in particular pleased me. The author was brief, very brief, and to the point. She simply wrote, 'I would do as I darned please.' A man would have said 'damned.' Miss Darrow, you are much like your mother. She was independent—just like me. Other answers were commendable. All of you will share in my will. And now, ladies, what about breakfast?"

As the women left to prepare the morning meal, Roger Leymore pulled Race aside. "Bennett, I've prided myself on the belief that no man could find my secret vault. But now—well, if you had five minutes to locate it, which direction would you take?"

Race looked at him, grinned. "I've been wondering what one would find under that huge fireplace."

"Say no more," Leymore said ruefully. "Come along. Let's go and have a drink."



The Model Corpse

By Bowen Conway

It was fitting that an etcher's wife should be murdered with an artist's copperplate. And when the law's snoopers came up to see the etchings, it was also appropriate that they should like the murderer's masterpiece most.



SETH WIDNER, Timkensville's constable, halted abruptly in the middle of the great study of the old Blashforth mansion as the front door buzzed. He wheeled his lion-maned head about in a slow circle at the

faces surrounding him, and sniffed noisily like a hound hot on the scent.

"All right," he barked, wiping his forehead with a checked bandanna. "Mrs. Sterns, you answer the door. I reckon it's Steve Standish's lawyer. The rest of us'll wait here."

The aged housekeeper rose slowly, rheumatically adjusted her right arm against a hip, and waddled out. A few seconds later came the rusty grating of the big front door as it swung open and shut, banging angrily as the gale howling down the valley pulled it tight. A murmur of voices welled up for an instant from the study, then died as the crone appeared at the threshold. Five pairs of eyes snapped toward her.

"Good evening." The tall, raven-haired, conservatively dressed man looming up behind Mrs. Sterns, spoke his greeting in low tones. He swept the circle of eyes, then tossed his brief case and overcoat on a nearby chair, and advanced into the room.

"Constable Widner?" He glanced quizzically at the grizzled police officer standing in his path like an immovable rock. Widner nodded sourly and was about to speak, when a man sitting to his left sprang from his chair, seized the other's arm, and pumped it madly.

"Thank heaven you got here, John," he exclaimed nervously.

Lawyer John Wayne smiled briefly. His eyes, wintry, tired, with a hint of bitterness in their cold depths, noticed the other's strained, haggard look. He patted his arm reassuringly, turned to Widner.

"You understand, Constable, that I'm here as legal adviser for Mrs. Blashforth's brother. But I'll volunteer to handle Mr. Blashforth's case, and"—he paused, glancing around at the housekeeper who had creakily resumed her chair—"Mrs. Sterns' as well. As an old friend of the family—"

Widner chuckled nastily. "Little need for that," he rasped, inclining his head toward the seated figure of Lionel Blashforth, master of the house and internationally known painter. "Nor for Mrs. Sterns, either." The constable paused and blew noisily in his bandanna. "As I see it, Standish is the one who'll need the most talkin' fer."

A match flared. Lionel Blashforth slowly rose to his feet, applied the glowing end to a cigarette.

"Steve couldn't tell you much over the phone, John," he said apologetically, kind grey eyes focussed intently on Wayne's. "Much less apologize for getting you out here at 8:30 in the morning. Steve thought you might be able to do—or find—something." The painter waved a hand vaguely around the room, indicating vast regions of the whole house. Then he cocked his head at Widner, "Mind, constable, if I put Mr. Wayne to rights?"

The police officer shifted uneasily, then shaking his head, slowly removed a large plug of chewing tobacco from a hidden pocket and, breaking off a piece, began to work it like a cud, keeping his bright eyes on Blashforth.

"Briefly," began Blashforth, "this is the situation. As Steve told you, I left

for Chicago Saturday on business connected with the Municipal Art Exhibition opening there next month. I'm to be represented by a few canvases," he interpolated parenthetically. "I left Jocelyn in good health, working, as a matter of fact, on some oils. Mrs. Sterns was away at the time visiting her niece in Buffalo. Steve, in Washington, wasn't expected back until yesterday.

"I returned last night by plane. The house was locked, the windows shut. Everything seemed normal otherwise—until I discovered Jocelyn dead in her studio upstairs. Naturally I informed Constable Widner at once. He arrived a few hours later, just before Steve and Mrs. Sterns, who had apparently returned late.

"I say 'apparently,' because the late discovery of one of Mrs. Sterns' gloves on the floor beside Jocelyn led to Widner's finding out that both she and Steve had actually returned a day earlier than originally expected. They had found the body and left, frightened. They remained at the Timkensville Hotel until yesterday morning when they decided to meet me here at the house, knowing I was due back then."

BLASHFORTH resumed his chair. "These facts were admitted, after pardonable hesitation by both Steve and Mrs. Sterns. However, each has categorically denied murdering my wife." He paused, looking up at Wayne blankly, his eyes suddenly dull and lustreless. "For it was murder, John. The county coroner established that last evening. Steve and Mrs. Sterns' alibi—"

"Sounded a bit thick, of course." Wayne paced up and down. "No police officer worth his salt would believe it, especially if he had established a motive for the crime." He glanced pointedly at Widner.

The cud of tobacco came slowly to a halt. The broad cheeks puffed out in a smug grin. Widner spat carefully at the fireplace, before replying.

"We got two, one good one for each of 'em. Standish, here, admitted he owed his sister more than twelve thousand smackers—overdue and can't be paid." The huge eyes rolled.

"Mrs. Sterns didn't give us no trouble either. The neighbors talked. Told us

about fights and arguments between Mrs. Blashforth and the housekeeper. Why they said that sometimes you could hear 'em yellin' clear across the valley.

"'Course, I don't put much stock in that kind of talk. Wimmen'll be wimmen. But twelve G's is easier to stummick. I'm bookin' Standish and keepin' Mrs. Sterns around fer good measure. It'll come out in the wash. Bound ter. Why either of 'em could have slugged Mrs. Blashforth—"

"We can skip that," remarked Wayne dryly. "As for the evidence, I'm not here *officially* in a sleuthing capacity. The trial—if any—will take care of it." He glanced down at his watch, shifted his eyes back to Widner. "However, there's no point in taking any of the suspects into town until morning. I suggest that everyone catch a little sleep. In the meantime, I'd like to have a look around."

The constable puffed up dangerously, like a badly swollen balloon, teetered on his heels for an instant, then evidently thought better of what he had been about to say. "All right," he conceded grudgingly, "but there's no use tryin' to mix things up. Everythin' tagged and catalogued," he finished smugly.

Wayne looked right through him. "I take it the body is still upstairs. You needn't object, constable. I won't steal it," he snapped sarcastically.

The lawyer wheeled, walked out of the study to the entrance hall. Familiarity with the house gave him direction. The stairs leading to the second floor were only a few feet away. He took them two at a time.

Light streamed from the open door of Jocelyn Blashforth's studio, just off the top part of the staircase. The glare was stark, eerie, cast in a great flood by slender blue fluorescent lamps the painter's wife had used to simulate daylight when working at night.

As Wayne stepped within and softly closed the door behind him, he heard the others ascending the stairs, filing past, going down the corridor to their rooms. A click of heels outside the studio door told him that Widner's sole deputy had taken up guard.

Shrugging his shoulders, he steeled himself, and walked slowly to the pitiful heap on the floor.

Jocelyn Blashforth had died probably without knowing what hit her. If she had,

ruminated Wayne, as he bent over her body, her surprise would have been enormous. For the murder weapon, glittering beside the corpse, clotted with blood and meticulously tagged, was a large, copper-plate engraving of his own face.

The lawyer remembered it immediately as one of a series of sketches Blashforth had done some years before for a popular magazine. He smiled grimly, glanced up at the gap in the line of other copper-plates resting edge to edge on the low, modernistic paneling that bordered the room at a height of a yard.

The room was empty, except for the corpse, the murder weapon, and sundry piles of oils and sketches scattered about on the floor.

Wayne exhausted its possibilities in two minutes. He did not touch the body, examining only the blood-stained weapon and its counterparts on the paneling. Very carefully he lifted them one by one, inspected every square inch front and back minutely. Finally he prodded the lethal plate, peered at it closely in the blinding glare.

RISING to his feet, Wayne brushed his hands together, walked to the studio door and opened it, pushing aside the deputy as he emerged.

Widner stood at the opposite end of the corridor, peering through a window out into the night.

"Got a moment, constable?" called Wayne loudly. "I'd like to have a look at the ground under the studio window."

Widner came, grumbling. They clattered down the stairs, pushed through the butler's pantry into the kitchen, jiggled with the lock of the door opening out on the backyard, and finally opened it. The constable went first, playing his flashlight on the wind-swept ground.

"What's all this tomfoolishness?" he growled, "I ain't no mind ter—"

Wayne ignored him. He seized the flashlight, moved swiftly to the wall beneath the studio window, and examined the ground.

"Have any of the family been out here since the body was discovered?" he asked, as the constable came up puffing.

"Think I'm crazy?" demanded Widner, "Anyway, if you want photographs of all the footprints we found around the house, I've got 'em here in my pocket—"

he paused suddenly, aware that the lawyer wasn't listening to him.

"What—"

"Shut up," snapped Wayne viciously. He cocked an ear, birdlike. Then, from above, sounded the thin squeak of a window opening. Abruptly the studio lights went out. In an instant both men were silhouetted against the glow of the flashlight as it played on the ground. A soft whooshing noise came swiftly down.

"Look out!" shouted Wayne. He pushed the constable violently aside, moved like a streak in the opposite direction. As the lawyer collided with the house wall, something big and heavy plunged past, grazed him closely, and hit the earth with a thud.

Widner's torch, in Wayne's hands, flicked for a brief instant. Then blazing again, climbed the wall to the studio window. Nothing. The circle of light descended, focussed on a dully gleaming mass half-buried in the earth. Ignoring Widner's protestations, the lawyer clutched the free end and heaved. It came loose with a shower of earth. Then it was caught in the brilliant beam.

Wayne flashed one glance at the printing surface of the copperplate. An instant later he had thrust it at Widner and dashed back to the kitchen door. In less than fifteen seconds, both men burst into the entrance hall.

The upstairs lights were out. With a sudden flood, they were on again, as the deputy standing at the head of the stairs flicked a switch.

Widner purpled, started to say something and stopped, staring.

Lionel Blashforth opened the door of the bathroom, which, adjoining his wife's studio, was visible from the foot of the stairs. He glanced curiously at the deputy as the lights came on, then moved down the corridor. The door of his room slammed sharply.

The deputy was stammering as they reached the second floor.

"One minute they wuz on—and the next it was pitchy black. I dunno—"

The constable glared at him, cast a vicious glance at Wayne's back already disappearing behind the studio door. Widner breathed hard and fast, clenched his hands, seemed about to burst, thought better of it, and retreated to his tobacco. He stalked off down the corridor.

Wayne sat in the studio, his stiff back against the wall, smoking cigarette after

cigarette until the sunny dawn came up over the hills beyond Timkensville, paling the fluorescents. He rose, snapped off the lights, and looked at his watch. Seventy-three.

Idly, he walked to the great sloping window that looked out on the north, glanced first at the cold, still body at his feet, then at a tall pile of sketches. Humming softly, he picked up the topmost sketch, studied it for a moment. Raising his head, he yawned.

Suddenly his fingers tightened. The smoldering cigarette in his fingers fell to the floor. He ground it out.

The constable, eyes heavy with sleep, staggered down the corridor. He paused at the staircase, eyes suddenly fixed on Wayne sitting next to the phone. The lawyer smiled grimly, eyes raised to the pudgy figure.

"You'd better bring them down, constable," he said, "I've got your murderer."

Wayne was sitting on the horsehair sofa in the study some minutes later as the family filed in, followed by the deputy and lastly Widner, his eyes bulging like a sick frog's.

"Mrs. Sterns couldn't possibly have hit Jocelyn Blashforth with that copperplate," the lawyer remarked perfunctorily. "She couldn't even wield a dust cloth, which is, of course, the reason Jocelyn wanted to get rid of her."

The lawyer shifted his gaze to Steve Standish. "You knew that Jocelyn planned to forgive the debt you owed her, even establish a trust fund in your name. She told me that at my office in Timkensville the morning after Lionel had left for Chicago."

Wayne inhaled his cigarette with deliberation. "I'm sorry, Lionel," he said slowly. "That leaves us—you—doesn't it?"

The artist paled. "I didn't—" he began.

"Yes, you did," accused the lawyer firmly. "You killed your wife. You killed her because you knew she was planning to divorce you, knew that your income, your ability to live well as an artist, would stop—just like that." Wayne snapped his fingers.

"You knew you had to kill her before she divorced you and changed her will. I know because the will was one of the two matters she came to see me about that morning.

"I rather thought you'd killed her," he continued, "after I saw the scratches that gold signet ring of yours made on the copperplate etching. I wanted a duplicate of that, so I made sure you knew I was going out into the garden with Widner. I was aware that you would try to kill me before I, as Jocelyn's lawyer, had a chance to produce the will she must have told you about when you came back—twelve hours after you'd started for Chicago."

Blashforth started violently. "You can't prove—"

"I can. Of course the scratches on the plates weren't enough. I've found a little more positive evidence. It was very simple getting on the Chicago express, making sure that the station master saw you go aboard, then leaving the express at a local station up the line and returning by bus, approaching the town from the eastern side.

"Back home once more, you killed Jocelyn, left unobserved, returned to a local station, and caught the next express for Chicago. I checked your business out there by phone. The exhibition committee hadn't even seen you."

The artist laughed hysterically. "That's rich! I can see a jury taking all that in—all except evidence that doesn't even exist."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," drawled Wayne. He held up a sheet of drawing paper. "This is what will convince any jury that you murdered your wife. When you came back, intent upon murder, you probably told Jocelyn some cock-and-bull story to allay suspicion. Even sketched her, as you often did, as she stood painting in front of the studio window. And when you'd finished the sketch you put it down, forgot it, and killed her." The lawyer tapped the drawing reflectively. "Artistic, undoubtedly a genuine Blashforth—a realistic piece, faithful to details.

"But you drew Jocelyn with her hair bobbed. And you couldn't possibly have seen her alive that way, because when I met her in town—just a few hours before you returned to murder her—she was wearing her hair long, the way you liked it. The way you'd never let her change, until that morning after she'd seen me about the will, and Steve, when I drove her in my car to her hairdresser's where she had it cut short."

Moth Bagged

"Alvin Hinkey" Yarn



By Joe Archibald

Alvin Hinkey got butterflies in his stomach when the big moth collector got bumped. Because it looked as if a nutty butterfly netter might be planning to skewer a wingless Gotham flatfoot for his cadaver collection.

Corporal Louis Garfunde
c/o Postmaster
New York, N. Y.

DEAR LOUIE:
By the time you get this letter, I guess yor will be in Rome seein' the sights—like houses marked "Eel Duce Slept Here" and the catacombs which are bone cellars. Hambone Noonan says to be sure and see one of the seven wonders of the world which is the Colossal of Rome, Louie.

I saw your old flame last night in Luigi's spaghetti joint. She says to tell you it is serious and she is on her last

lap. The blossoms off the lemon tree you pressed up and sent Eva gave her hay fever, and she is sore at you. It made her break four dates with some of the armed forces in one week. I noticed she was not wearing the slave bracelet you won that night at Coney Island for kayoing the African dodger.

But we are all behind you here buildin' your morale, Louie, savin' the fat instead of chewin' it an' all those patriotic things. Good rye is scarce. I had to give a pint of blood for some last week.

Me and Hambone have still got butterflies in our stomachs as a result of solv-

ing a very mysterious murder uptown. The rub-out was good for the authorities as it took place in Woodlawn where a big cemetery was handy. We were both in back of Joe's Cigar Store on Lafayette St. trying to find out if the dice games there was crooked, when we get a call from headquarters. Hambone answers the phone, then hangs up and says:

"Somebody would git murdered just when I'm behind seven bucks."

We go uptown to Woodlawn, and finally arrive at a big frame house with lots of trees around it. There are some cops already there stealing grapes off a vine. They say the corpus delicti has not been moved an inch and is like they first found it.

"Now, Alvin," Hambone says to me. "Here is the chance to observe how a real murder investigation should be investigated, as after all you are just a beginner. I'll explain the fine points as I go along. Let's go inside, huh?"

"I imagine it is necessary," I says. "Even I know that much."

We go in and meet a widow and the D.A.'s appraiser of the defunct. A pooch walks out into the hall, looks at us funny, walks around in a circle, and then goes back into the living room again. It is an English bulldog, big enough to be saddled and used for a horse.

"How did anybody git in an' murder somebody with that around?" Hambone asks the widow who was the wife of the late Sylvanus Fritchey.

"That is what I would like to know, among other things," the bereft helpmate says between sniffs. "Won't you come in?"

We enter the Fritchey living room, which is quite gloomy as the furniture almost came over on *The Mayflower*. There is the victim in a big chair. On the floor, at his feet, is a bronze statue about three feet high. It is of a mythical character named Mercury, who was a messenger for the gods and has wings on his feet. It is plain to see he brought Sylvanus bad news.

"Don't touch nothin', Alvin," Hambone says quickly. "How long has he been departed?" he asks the expert on such things.

"Practically a whole day," the M.D. says. "Some person tapped him with the statue."

"How come you just found him?" Hambone asks Mrs. Fritchey. "Or wasn't you

two speakin' or somethin'? Didn't the dog even let out a peep?"

Mrs. Fritchey says she was visiting friends in Tenafly, N. J., over the week end, and just got back that very morning to discover she was a beneficiary. Maybe the neighbors heard Mr. Deeds bark and we could ask them. Mr. Deeds, she explains, is the pedigreed bone punisher. He and Sylvanus were inseparable.

"Mr. Deeds always accompanied Syl when my husband went out into the country to capture lepidoptera," the widow says.

"Lep—leopardop—" Hambone scratches his head and looks at me. "You hear what she said, Alvin? There ain't no leopards in this country."

"I forgot I was conversing with policemen," Mrs. Fritchey says, looking down her nose of which she had plenty. "They are butterflies. Sylvanus pursued them as a hobby and has quite a collection. He even appeared on a radio program. His *Citheronia regalis* is definitely out of this world, yet he trapped it on a bush in Yonkers. And his *Apantesis virgo*—"

"Alvin," Hambone says. "You bring the aspirin?"

Mrs. Fritchey goes on and says Sylvanus was retired and living off royalties on a rattle-proof window blind. Hambone tells her he has enough of the corpse's background and to let us all find out who knocked him off.

"Maybe somebody else also chased them leppy—what you said—and maybe wanted that *parenthesis vertigo* of Fritchey's."

"Why, Sylvanus did have a competitor," the widow says, her eyes popping. "Herman Zelch had been pestering Sylvanus for weeks to swap him the *Citheronia regalis* for a *Uthesia bella* and an *Actias luma*. But Herman would not kill even a butterfly without feeling bad."

"Okay," Hambone says. "But Sylvanus was not a butterfly. I knew a guy once who cried every time he found a robin's egg that fell out of a tree, but it was me who arrested him for cuttin' the throats of three citizens from ear to ear and emptying their pocketbooks. We'll case the joint now, Alvin, snap pitchers, and dust for prints. First off, we'll look for marks of human paws on the bronze skull-buster."

"Wouldn't the criminal wear gloves?"

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I ask Hambone as civilly as anybody could.

"You been readin' detective stories again, Alvin," Hambone snaps. "This crook might have wanted to be different and didn't wear none. All cases are not alike like olives, remember that."

"Look, Hambone," I reply. "If Herman Zelch was so greedy for the butterfly, we should look and see if it is gone, huh?"

"Are you in charge here or am I?" Noonan yelps. "You sit down over there and watch, Alvin."

I do. Mr. Deeds comes in and wanders around like he had just gobbled up four Mickey Finns. The pooch keeps going around in circles, then trots out into the hall. Mrs. Fritchey calls to Mr. Deeds, but he won't come back.

"It is as if he thinks I was to blame," the widow says. "He always came when I called him. Did you see how he looked at me? Oh, he is never going to forgive me for going to Tenaflly—never. He'll never speak to me again."

I WATCH Noonan and other things. Behind the chair in which the remains still sit is a pedestal on which the statue rested. It is quite solid. All the shades in the room were pulled down, all except one. That one was rolled up to the limit. In one corner of the room there is an old woolen shawl crumpled up. Close to it there is a rubber ball all pitted.

"Well, there ain't no prints nowhere," the helpers tell Hambone. "It looks like you got a cinch here, Noonan. Zelch crooked Sylvanus Fritchey and lifted the moth awright."

"So everybody has solved the murder except me," Hambone says sneeringly. "So I will just go home, as I am only in the way."

"Your husband didn't like too much sunlight, Mrs. Fritchey?" I ask in spite of Hambone. "The shades—"

"Sylvanus always pulled them down at night. He hated people to look in at him when they went by," the widow says. "Ohhhhh Mr. Deeds!" she suddenly screeches.

The pooch does not show, so Mrs. Fritchey sits down and carries on something fierce. "He won't ever speak to me again, I know. When he looked at me before he went out, he looked like he'd never seen me before. Oh, I can't bear it. I—"

"Look," Hambone says. "Never mind the pooch. It is alive, huh? Mr. Fritchey won't never worry about no more increases in taxes, or have you forgot? Let's see them stuffed butterflies."

"And Mr. Deeds never even bit either one of you when you came in!" Mrs. Fritchey wails.

"I'm awful sorry," I says. "When he comes back maybe he won't slight us again. Does he go for hambones?"

What a case, Louie!

Well, we go into the late Sylvanus Fritchey's den and look at the specimens of leopardsoptera. The widow lets out a shriek. She stabs her finger at a gap in the collection framed on the wall.

"The *Citheronia regalis* is gone! That fiend killed Sylvanus and made him swap."

"Which is a good trick if anybody could do it," I says. "Hambone, we have nothing more to do than go pick up Zelch and make him take down his hair."

"He is bald," Mrs. Fritchey said.

"It is only a figment of speech, Ma'am," Noonan says irritably. "It means we will make him sing."

"He can't hold one note," Mrs. Fritchey replies. Hambone paws at his face and sighs deeply. "Why not just make him confess?"

"We will," Hambone says. "If Zelch had any principles at all, he would at least have left the other two moths in exchange." On the long table under the collection of moths is a goldfish bowl, Louie. There are two fishes and a turtle swimming about.

Hambone says quickly, "He had to move the table and the bowl, the killer, to reach up for the butterfly, the zitheronium regallis. Most likely he took off his gloves by that time and forgot to put them back on. There should be prints on the bowl. You can see them with a naked eye, guys. Hurry up. I can't wait."

It is a swell-looking turtle, Louie. It squints at me and looks for a minute like it was grinning and licking its chops.

Well, there were no prints on the goldfish bowl on the table. Hambone says it does not faze him, as it is a cinch Herman Zelch succumbed to an uncontrollable desire to own the butterfly and committed a cold-blooded crime in the act.

We go over to see Herman Zelch. Herman lives in an apartment house in Fleetwood. When we are admitted into his

presence he is inserting a pin through the torso of a very colorful moth.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," Herman says as if he had done nothing worse than step on a cockroach. "Isn't this a beauty? Imagine it being near a garbage dump when I snared it. A *Papilio glaucus*!"

"And maybe you forgot the specimen you knocked off awhile back, you crook!" Hambone says. "A *Homo mortalis* named Sylvanum Fritchiglucose."

Not bad for Noonan, hey Louie?

"Why I was sure you said Sylvanus Fritch," Herman says. "Maybe you are a Greek and—"

"Let's stop kidding, Zelch," Noonan comes right out. "Fritch was clunked with a statue and is deader than that moth you are committing harry kerry on. Somebody stole his—what was it Mrs. Fritch called it, Alvin?"

"All I know is it was a rare butterfly, Hambone," I answer him.

"The *Citheronia regalis*?" Zelch yelps.

"Yeah, and let's stick to the English language from now on, Zelch. Don't act innocent. Where was you between the hours of eleven P. M. on Saturday night and one A. M. Sunday morning? The medical examiner says he was sure those were the hours when Fritch got the business."

"Why I was—" Herman Zelch catches himself and does not finish. "Why, I have a poor memory, gentlemen. You certainly would not accuse me of knocking off my dear friend, Sylvanus Fritch?"

"Wouldn't we though?" Noonan yelps. "Ain't we the limit?"

"Why, I—that is preposterous," Herman says. "You are ribbing me, ha, ha!"

"Of course," Hambone says. "We got nothing else to do than play April Fool pranks in November. Get on your coat and hat and let's go downtown and talk to the D.A. This time of day he is awful lonesome and must have done all his crossword puzzles by now."

We take Herman Zelch down to headquarters. We are putting him on the fire in the grill room when a flatfoot comes in and says the boys in the lab got a print from a doorknob all developed. So we hustle Herman in, take his prints, and compare them with the other one. We discover that the print on the doorknob was from Herman's middle digit.

What was more, a neighbor of Her-

man's calls up the D.A. She is a Mrs. Bleary who has a rose garden close to the Fritch back fence. She says she heard a character threaten Sylvanus with more than a birthday present on the night the murder must have been committed. The D.A. tells Mrs. Bleary to come to see him right away, which she does.

"Yeah," the neighbor says. "This man said just as plain, 'You are a stubborn old goat, Sylvanus. Somebody ought to hit you over the head and steal that specimen. If anybody does, you can be sure it'll be me. Once more, will you swap?' That's what I heard."

The D.A. takes her to the grill room and lets her hear Herman say a few words. "That's the voice," she yips. "That is the man!"

We grill Herman some more. He admits he made the threat, but that it was one as idle as a hobo with hookworm. "Anyway I oughter of killed him. We both tried for that *Citheronia regalis* the same time. When we lifted up our nets, I could swear the butterfly flew out of mine and into his. I said we could cut it in half and settle the argument, but it was always whole hog or none with Fritch."

"I thought you was catching butterflies that day," Hambone says. "Oh, I see what you mean. Ha! Well, you have no alibi, Herman. You left prints at the Fritch murder scene. Put yourself in my place and ask what chance you think you got?"

"Get me a lawyer," Zelch says.

"You are wasting money that belongs to your estate," I tell him, Louie. "It had to be you as none of Fritch's neighbors heard a dog bark that night—Mr. Deeds knew you and would let you in."

"Yeah," Hambone says. "That was just what I was goin' to say. You shut up, Alvin."

Louie, I get sore. "Look, you big hunk of non-essential manpower," I says right out to Noonan. "You are a liar by the clock. This is the third time you've borrowed brains to work with and—"

"Alvin," Hambone says. "You go to the D.A. and tell him how you just acted. And you tell him to get you off this case with me. Maybe I'll ask you to work with me again when you learn not to be disrespectful."

They lock Herman up, and I see the D.A. He is a swell guy as you know,



Louie. He says if I have any angles Ham-bone won't listen to, that I got two or three days to work on my own.

"I have a couple of angles, D.A." I admit. "I don't think Zelch is guilty, even if the facts are as damaging as a bazooka."

"I'm inclined to agree with Noonan, Hinkey," the D.A. says. "But anyway, prove we are not right, if you can."

I don't know how to start, Louie, so I go up to Woodlawn and look over the Fritchey estate once more. I walk into the garden out back. There I see Mr. Deeds. The pooch is sitting down and looks like he is trying to think of something. Then he runs over to a rose arbor, digs hard as if he wished to strike oil for the widow, then gives up.

He sniffs at the ground, then antelopes over to his doghouse and digs three holes in back of it. Mr. Deeds looks almost like he shook his head in despair and pants very loud.

I sit down and watch the pooch. Finally he starts digging again over near a bird bath. Mr. Deeds gets down into soft dirt about a foot, then backs away and sits down to gaze mournfully into space.

"What ails you, old pal?" I says, walking over to Mr. Deeds and risking losing a leg from the knee down. The canine looks at me and says, "Arrrgh—oof!"

He runs away again and starts digging next to a picket fence. This time he is rewarded. He comes up with a pork chop bone and begins to pulverize it. Louie, did you ever know a pooch that forgot where it hid a bone?

I hear Mrs. Fritchey screech for Mr. Deeds, but he does not even wiggle.

I sit there for an hour and watch Mr. Deeds finish his repast, and then go hunting for his dessert. It is very still in the neighborhood and a warm day for November. I get drowsy. Suddenly there is a sound like a gunshot. I get up and run, but do not get far. I run into a tree so hard. I shake two birds' nests and two squirrels out of it.

It is maybe an hour before I find where I am once more. Mr. Deeds is standing over me and licking my face. I wonder for a few awful seconds if dogs wash everything they eat first, like a raccoon.

"Go away, Mr. Deeds, as I am your friend and am trying to find out who slew your dear master," I says. There is a bump over my left eye you couldn't have squeezed into a cup. The Fritchey residence keeps going around and around.

Mr. Deeds trots away. I washed the bump on my pate at the bird bath, but it does not take away the ache. I go to the door of the house and knock. Out comes the widow with a copy of Sylvanus Fritchey's

will in her hand. She is weeping.

"I am sorry," I says. "Sylvanus must have been an awful good husband, huh? Well, parting is such sweet sorrow and they are not gone for good, only away. So—"

"Mr. Hinkey," Mrs. Fritchey sniffs. "Mrs. Bleary's cat just walked right through here and spit at Mr. Deeds. He did not even chase her, to say nothing about biting off some more of her tail. Did you ever hear of a dog that mourned so over its departed master?"

"The pooch is not himself, awright," I admit. "Even though I never knew him when he was. Could I have some liniment or iodine? That tree was the hardest one I ever run into, Mrs. Fritchey. A shot went off and—"

"Oh, it was only a truck backfiring," the widow says. "Wipe your feet and come in."

AFTER first aid, I saunter around where Sylvanus got it and see that the statue is back on the pedestal. The windows are all shaded but one. It looks like Mrs. Fritchey wouldn't think of tidying up until after the obsequies at the neighborhood mortician's. I ask can I look at the butterflies once more. She says it is all right, and do I want any?

"I don't know what I could do with butterflies," I admit. "But thanks just the same. Give them to Mr. Zelch."

"Where he is going, they won't last long," the widow says. "The specimens are fragile enough. When will they pull the switch?"

I look at the lepidoptera, and then at the goldfish bowl. The turtle seems to know me, Louie. He sticks his noggin above the water and opens his mouth like I was going to throw him a fly or something. Then I see something in the bottom of the bowl. I says to Mrs. Fritchey who just came in with two cokes:

"I don't think goldfish and turtles have pin-up gals, do you?"

"Are you whacky, Mr. Hinkey?" the widow gulps. "Are you sure that bump on your head has not done more serious damage than you think? Maybe I had better call a doctor."

"Oh, don't bother," I says. "Skip it." The turtle is surfacing again and has his neck stretched to the limit like a dame sitting behind a post at the Metro. I get an idea that makes me scoff at my-

self, and drink the coke. Then I beg to be excused.

Hambone calls me when I get home that night. "Hello, Alvin. I am sorry to have gone off the handle like an old Model T. But you got to learn not to get so cocky your first few months as a detective."

"I forgot myself, I guess," I says to Hambone, with my tongue in my cheek.

"Well, we broke that case in record time, Alvin. We put the new lie detector on Herman Zelch and ast him was he in the Fritchey house the night of the murder. He said he wasn't. Well, the lie detector blew its top and now has to go back for repairs. He wouldn't tell us where he hid the zitheronium regillis but he will when the barber comes to shave his hair off—oh, I forgot, he is bald. But they'll slit his pants leg and then he'll confess."

"I don't really see how you do it, Hambone," I reply. "You'll go all the way up to commissioner before you know it."

"Oh, you're just saying that, Alvin."

"Who else could be?" I inquire of Noonan.

Well, the next day I go to Mrs. Fritchey's house again. She is in weeds which are black clothes, Louie, and is just going out to hear them speed Sylvanus along the big slide. She is very glad to see me as she says I can stay and guard things, while she is gone. She will give me twenty bucks.

"Fine," I says. "But don't you trust Mr. Deeds no more?"

"No. He forgot to bite the mailman this morning. Yesterday morning he did not chase the man who reads the gas meter. I'll be back in three hours, Mr. Hinkey."

Louie, I start investigating. I look at the pedestal the statue of Mercury rested on. I see it is of some kind of stone that is chipped in places. I sit down and start reconstructing the crime. About an hour later Mr. Deeds comes in and takes a long deep breath and sits down.

Suddenly the pooch just about stands on his head and rubs the top of his big noggin against the broadloom. I go over and coo at him and examine his pate. I see he could use a veterinary. I keep adding up and get a sum that must be wrong.

Mrs. Fritchey comes back, weepy of course. "It was a beautiful send-off," she says. "You would of thought Sylvanus



was the salt of the earth, Mr. Hinkey. I wonder if I only imagined he was serious when he threw a shoe at me that time. Oh, Mr. Deeds!"

I tell her the pooch needs an M.D. We drive Mr. Deeds to one right away.

The vet is named Dr. Dane Bernard. He gives Mr. Deeds the works, some of which was a whiff of chloroform, and then takes an instrument and probes at Mr. Deed's cranium. What does he come up with but a piece of stone of some kind.

"He evidently run into something or somebody bounced a dornick off his head," the vet says. "He'll be lots better by tomorrow. Call me if he ain't."

"Mrs. Fritchey," I yelp, as we lug Mr. Deeds out in a basket. "We must hurry downtown to the D.A. and free an innocent man of murder. Herman Zelch is as innocent of the crime as I am."

"Mr. Hinkey, let's go back to the doctor and let him look at you."

DOWNTOWN, everybody, especially Hambone Noonan, laughs at me. I show them the piece of mineral that came out of Mr. Deed's head and state very indignantly that I will be very glad to prove everything.

"Come up to Mrs. Fritchey's," I says, "and I will reconstruct the crime and produce the assassin."

"Let's humor him," the D.A. says. "I haven't had much fun lately. My brother-in-law moved in a month ago and—"

"Alvin, this will set crime detection back fifty years," Noonan says. "I wouldn't miss this for the world."

We all go up to Mrs. Fritchey's house. The D.A. sits down in the chair where we found Sylvanus and says, "Let the show start, Alvin."

"Awright," I says. "See that window shade all the way up? There is the bed in the corner where Mr. Deeds, the bulldog, slept. Sylvanus pulled down the shades and settled lowr for a quiet evening with that magazine on the floor there. *Lepidoptera Lore*. Mr. Deeds got drowsy and dreamed of canine Hedy Lamarr's.

"Suddenly the shade flew up and made a sound like a rifle shot. Mr. Deeds bolted in panic. He is along in years and his eyesight is not 20-20. He ran kerwhacko into the pedestal there and toppled the bronze statue of Mercury. Mr. Deeds, I would imagine, weighs more than Sinatra, and don't forget he had a good start."

"Oh, brother," the D.A. says.

"Just let me finish," I sniffs. "I have the piece of stone that the vet took out of the lump on Mr. Deed's noggin right here. The M.D. specializing in healing four-legged creatures will testify. Well, the bronze statue fell off the pedestal,

dropped on Sylvanus Fritch's noggin and did the fatal trick. It rolled to the floor and of course did not have prints on it.

"Mr. Deeds suddenly began to act nothing like himself. He forgot what his name was, and so wouldn't answer the hail of his mistress. He forgot where he hid his bones and wouldn't bite public servants. He forgot he was mad with a certain feline. In short, gentlemen, Mr. Deeds has a brain as well as some humans, more in fact than ones named Noonan."

"Oh, yeah?" Hambone says. "D.A., we ought to take Alvin away now before he gets violent, huh?"

"Shut up, Noonan," the D.A. says. "I am interested. Something tells me—go on Alvin."

"So anything with a brain could get amnesia, even Mr. Deeds," I tell the skeptics.

"Well, what do you know?" the D.A. gulps. "It is possible, of course." He gets up and examines the statue and the pedestal. "Go on, Alvin."

"Oh yeah?" Hambone scoffs. "So Mr. Deeds went up and stole the butterfly, the zinthronium regillia, Alvin. Try and tell me the big bulldog chased butterflies with a net, too. You are the one that is going to git the net, Alvin Hinkiey."

"Yeah, what about that angle, Alvin? For a minute there you had me," the D.A. says.

"Come upstairs, gents," I gloat. I go up to the late Sylvanus Fritch's den and over to the fishbowl. I reach in and take out a pin and hold it up to Mrs. Fritch.

"Is that the type of miniature skewer, Sylvanus, rest his soul, used to transfix the butterflies?"

"Of course," the widow says.

"Okay. So that one, the prize specimen, and don't ask me to name it, was not pinned securely. It dropped loose and fell into the fishbowl. The turtle there ate it in instalments.

"All we have to do to clinch the case against the real killer, Mr. Deeds, is to ask a naturalist if a turtle eats butterflies. Why look at the turtle now! His neck is out of the water and he is mouthing at the other butterflies up there. What do you think?"

The D.A. stands there with his mouth open, Louie. Then he kneels down and

plucks something off the broadloom. It is a very tiny piece of butterfly wing. "There, that is the clincher," I says. "They are very fragile. A piece broke off when it hit the edge of the goldfish bowl before plopping in. Maybe we could get an autopsy on the turtle."

"I got enough," the D.A. says. "If the vet swears he got that piece of stuff out of the dog's skull and it matches the other stuff in the pedestal, what else would anybody think? Alvin, you are a genius."

"Yes," I says, "Mr. Deeds unwittingly slew his master. Oh, it was nothing."

"An English bulldog with amnesia," Hambone yelps, not convinced. "I will not swallow that one."

"The evidence is enough for me," the D.A. says. "If a dog forgets where it buries a bone and—"

It is just then that Mr. Deeds comes in, a little bleary eyed from the bye-bye juice. He runs right into the wall and gets knocked back on his haunches. A funny look comes into Mr. Deeds's eyes and he seems to ask himself, "Why, where have I been?" Then he sees Noonan's leg hanging over the side of a chair and leaps for it. The second jolt freed him of amnesia, Louie.

Well, Hambone was treated for lacerations and hydrophobia and made comfortable in a nearby hospital. The vet testified. They had a consultation at headquarters and agreed that under the strange circumstances, they better not plant Herman in the cremating Chippendale. They all accepted my findings, all except Hambone who still has distemper.

"Why didn't you have an alibi, though?" the D.A. yelps at Herman when they take him out of the ice-box.

"Because I was there trying to get the butterfly," Zelch says. "That must of all happened just after I left. And you know I was also tempted to crock him myself? A strange case, wasn't it? That was simply terrible, the loss of the *Citheronia regalis*, I mean."

He could say that again, hey Louie? Well, keep punchin' toward Brenner Pass. You was always a wow at makin' passes, huh? That is how you met Eva. How are the Eytalian dames, Louie? Write Noonan if you get an hour off as anybody would feel sorry for the dumb cluck.

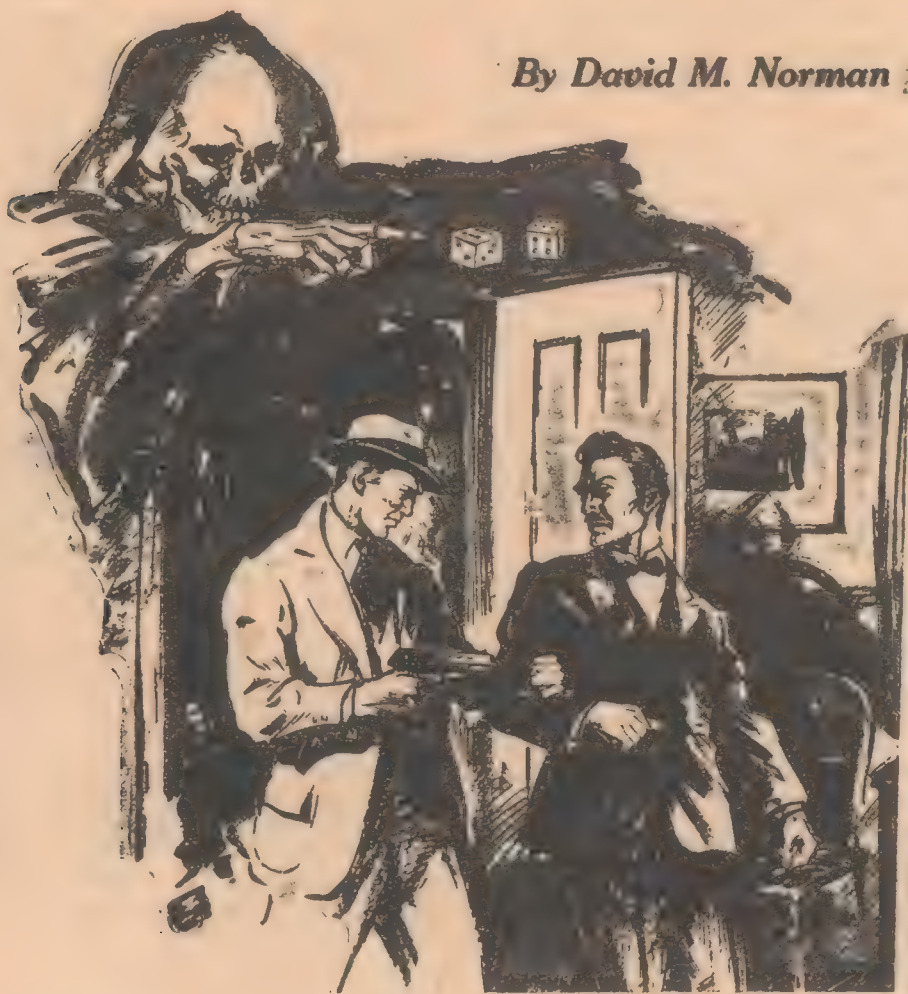
Always your pal,

Alvin.

When the cops found Kady with the warm corpse of his victim, they wanted to nab him. But the only way to pin a penalty on the killer was by setting him free. For as Kady announced:

Homicide's My Right

By David M. Norman



HE WAS a man of about forty-five, fairly well-dressed, but with a furtive air. He had a nervous habit of looking behind him every dozen or so steps.

At the next corner he came to a dead-stop, moved toward the wall of a building, and stood there for five minutes. He puffed greedily on a cigarette. They'd been scarce where he came from. It

seemed to him that he'd never get enough of them again.

Finally he swung around the corner and made for a small, poorly lighted hardware store with dirty windows. It was just before nine o'clock at night.

A man with a black patch over one eye came through some filthy curtains separating the store proper from a back room where he apparently lived, a fact

that was broadcast by greasy cooking odors coming from it.

The nervous man leaned against the counter. "I just got out. Fellow named Rick Jordan sent me. Do you understand?"

"What do you want and have you got the dough to pay for it?" the hardware dealer demanded in one breath.

"I want a gun—one that will do a neat little job. I've got the money. One hundred bucks."

"Okay." The hardware dealer opened one of his cases, took out a large tray of cheap cutlery, and lifted the whole top off it. Beneath the tray, bedded in cloth, lay four guns of various sizes and calibres.

"Any one will cost you the hundred. I can't give you any more than enough bullets to fill the gun, though. They're hard to get these days."

"One loading will be enough, thanks." The nervous man pointed at a blue-black .38 revolver. "I'll take that one."

Two minutes later he was out of the store and walking briskly along in the direction of the better section of the city. He soon located the place he was after. It was a large apartment building, swanky and tall. The nervous man walked into the lobby, headed straight for the elevators. If any flunky had happened to be around, he'd have been slugged.

Fortunately for both the missing attendant and the workings of the nervous man's plans, the lobby was empty. Elevators were self-operated, and he got into one. He had to study the buttons and read the directions for a moment. Many things in this modern world were a bit unfamiliar—or had been forgotten by him.

The elevator dropped him off at the seventeenth floor. He walked down the corridor to the last apartment. Beside it was a neat brass nameplate bearing the name of Alan Henderson. The nervous man smiled and rang the bell.

Someone on the other side of the door approached it.

"Who is it?" a voice asked.

"Package for Mr. Henderson. You gotta sign."

The nervous man drew his newly purchased gun and calmly pulled the hammer back until it clicked in place. His

finger caressed the trigger and his smile broadened.

A key turned, then a bolt slid back and the door opened. The nervous man shoved the gun forward. The occupant of the apartment backed up, his face turning a grey that resembled death itself. He half-raised his hands.

"Pete," he gulped. "It's Pete Kady. I—never expected to see you—again."

"I'll tell the world you didn't," Kady grunted. "Sit down, Nick. I notice you've taken a new name. Sit down!"

The man called Henderson plopped into a chair. He kept his hands up though.

"Look, Pete, you don't have to get rough about this. Everything turned out for the best, didn't it?"

"Oh, sure, sure, it did. I had a fine time. Spent most of it thinking about you living in luxury. That was the most fun I had—thinking. Nick, your number was up exactly fifteen years ago last Wednesday. Since then you've been living on borrowed time. Borrowed from me, because I couldn't get at you."

"No Pete. No—don't. Don't do it—"

PETER KADY shot Henderson through the stomach first. Then he raised the gun a trifle and sent a slug through his heart. One more bullet crashed into his head. Peter Kady's gun hand never trembled the slightest. He'd planned this so long it seemed like that part of the dream he'd enjoyed most for fifteen years of lonesome nights.

He calmly placed the gun on a table, dusted his hands as if they had touched something tainted, then looked around for the telephone. He had a little trouble with the dial. They were comparatively new things to him, but finally a voice answered his ring.

"Police Headquarters."

"You got a dick down there named Rourke? Jim Rourke?"

"We have a detective-lieutenant by that name," the desk officer advised.

"Well, well," the killer exclaimed. "So Rourke went up in the world, did he? Maybe I can bring him down again. Put him on the wire, will you?"

Shortly, the killer heard a voice he remembered through those fifteen long years.

"This is an old pal of yours, Rourke. Real old, but I don't think you've for-

gotten me. Now don't start asking questions. This call is in the line of work for you. There's a dead man at Apartment 17C in the Cedar Apartments on Wright Avenue."

"A dead man," Rourke commented cautiously, half believing this was a trick. "What did he die from?"

"Well," the killer laughed easily, "there's a slug in his stomach, another through his heart, and a third through his head. Oh, he's dead all right."

"Who did it?" Rourke demanded while his free hand pushed buttons.

"I did, Lieutenant. Come on over. I'll be waiting for you. And, Lieutenant—I think you had better come alone."

Rourke hung up, took his service pistol out of the desk drawer, and slid it into a shoulder holster. Then he grabbed his hat and rushed out to the street where a fast car was waiting.

Some fifteen minutes later, he stopped in front of the designated apartment building and hurried inside. If this was a joke, Rourke didn't like it. He could take jokes, but not one like this. With long strides he crossed the lobby—and they were long strides because Rourke was six feet two.

He located the apartment door, discovered that it was ajar. Gun in hand, he stepped carefully toward it. Through the opening he could smell cordite. He slowly raised one foot and sent it crashing against the door. As it flew open, he leaped into the room, revolver leveled.

"Hello, Rourke," the killer grinned smugly. "The years have been kind to you. Really, I'd have known you anywhere."

Rourke stared, first at the corpse, then at the gun on the table, finally at the killer.

"Peter Kady," Rourke said softly. "The man I arrested for murder fifteen years ago. When did they let you out?"

"A couple of days ago. Say, Rourke, do you remember how I always told you what a grave error you made then? That I hadn't killed Nick Norris, as you accused me of doing?"

"Sure, I remember." Rourke stepped over beside the chair where the dead man was slumped. A half second's examination told him the man was very, very dead. And a grim, terrible suspicion was taking shape in his brain.

"You made quite a song-and-dance of

the act, too," he added. "But the jury believed us and not you."

"That's right," Kady said. "Even juries can be wrong, though. Aren't you going to put handcuffs on me for killing that rat in the chair?"

"I'll oblige." Rourke sat down. "Mind telling me the story, Kady?"

KADY lit a cigarette. "You don't have to keep the gun trained on me, Rourke. I've done my killing. Think back now. I was arrested for the murder of my partner in the jewelry business. You claimed—and produced witnesses—to the effect that Nick Norris and I fought a battle to the death atop a cliff overlooking the sea. You claimed I threw him over. His body was found later, smashed to an unrecognizable mass. You could not, however, prove premeditation."

"If I could have," Rourke said grimly, "you'd have gone to the chair. I rather think that little omission will be rectified this time."

Kady chuckled. "The motive was that Nick Norris and I quarrelled. That we accused one another of stealing stock from the jewelry store. Two hundred thousand dollars worth, to be exact. It never did come out which one of us was the crook. I refused to talk and Norris was dead. So you claimed."

"All right." Rourke arose. "Let's stop talking. You're under arrest for murder, Kady. You can make a statement if you want to."

"Oh, boy," Kady laughed, "am I going to make a statement! Take another look at the dead man. Yes, I killed him. I admit it freely. This is my confession. I'll put it in writing or relate it into a sound camera if you like, but—you can't arrest me for killing him."

Rourke looked at the dead man. Then he glanced at Kady.

"You must have gone stir-crazy," he said.

"No. Really, I've never been saner. The man I shot happens to be Nick Norris. I was convicted and punished for his murder fifteen years ago."

"What?" Rourke yelled. "Are you completely—? Wait! The dead man doesn't look like Norris."

"Certainly not. Because he has been living as Alan Henderson. When he went off that cliff, he wasn't killed. The body you found was of some stranger. Norris

merely wanted to see me burn for his murder, so he crawled into a little shell somewhere. All this I learned from friends I made in prison who got out and did some investigating for me. When it was safe to come out, he'd changed his appearance.

"Maybe he doesn't look like Norris, but his fingerprints will prove it. They're still on file, I suppose. He was bonded a couple of dozen times, pinched once on suspicion of being a fence, and he got into trouble with the F.B.I., too, those years ago. His prints will still be around."

Rourke sat down again. After a second look at the corpse, he was beginning to agree with Kady, and Rourke's wits were spinning. The dead man very probably was Norris, for whose murder Kady had served fifteen years.

"If you're telling the truth," Rourke said, "I'm in a fine mess. I can't arrest you for the murder of a man you already paid the penalty for killing. That's double jeopardy. I—don't exactly know what to do under these circumstances."

"But I do," Kady arose. "I'm walking out of here, Rourke. A free man. You can't even hold me for violation of parole, because I raised enough trouble in prison that I was forced to serve out every last day of my sentence. I'm not on parole. You can't pinch me so—I'll run along. I'll be staying at the Royalton House."

"Hold it," Rourke's gun leveled again. "I've got to know a few things about this. Whose gun is that on the table?"

"Mine. I bought and paid for it. All the cops in New York couldn't make me tell where I got it. Sure, killing Norris was premeditated. Probably the most premeditated murder in history. I planned it for fifteen years and you can't touch me, Rourke."

"Stand right where you are," Rourke ordered softly. "You're under arrest for carrying concealed weapons and for discharging firearms."

Kady shrugged. "Oh well, I thought of that, too, and saw no way out. Okay, I'll come quietly. What if I do get a few months or even a year? I can take it. Seeing Nick die was well worth it."

LIEUTENANT ROURKE stood by in the station house while Kady was searched. Something more than four

hundred dollars was taken from his pockets.

"All honest money," Kady snickered. "I had part of it when I entered prison. The rest I earned at about a dime a day working harder than I ever worked before in my life. And all because Norris wouldn't come forward and show he wasn't dead."

Rourke said, "Kady, what was behind Norris' motives in letting you take the rap? As I recall it, your jointly owned jewelry store went to pot just before your arrest, when a clerk absconded with three-quarters of the stock."

Kady grinned. "That was the only good break I had. The clerk's name was Al Parker, and he beat Norris to the punch. Say, Lieutenant, I hope you're not sore about this."

"Me? Why no, Kady. It seems I made a very bad mistake those fifteen years ago. I'm sorry it happened and sorry for you."

"Not your fault," Kady grumbled. "Norris was responsible for it all. Rourke, if you're not sore, give me a break. I spent fifteen of the best years of my life serving time for a murder I hadn't as yet committed. Killing Norris was ridding the world of something useless anyhow. Just don't go too hard on me when I come up for sentence on the gun-carrying rap."

Rourke nodded. "I guess you deserve a break. I might be able to see to it that you're let off with a fine. Yes, I owe you something, Kady. First mistake I ever made, and if they'd sent you to the chair . . ."

Rourke shivered visibly. Kady smiled somewhat grimly.

"Forget it. I'm still alive and they can't burn me for killing Norris. I'm not a crook, an ordinary mug. I can still be useful to society if I get the chance."

Rourke winked at him, announced in a loud voice that he wanted Kady for questioning before he was locked up, then led the prisoner to a private office.

"Luckily," he told Kady, "you haven't made any confession except the one to me at Norris's place. Now here is the angle. That gun can be traced. Say it was Norris'. Say you went to him for an explanation and he pulled the gun. That you were forced to shoot him in self-defense after you got the gun away from him. Say he fell into the chair."

Kady's eyes glowed. "I am dumb. Fifteen years I planned this job and never figured out a little detail like that. I'll probably go scot free."

"No, I'm sure you won't," Rourke said. "After all, it's theoretically murder even though you can't be tried for it. The judge is bound to hand you the stiffest possible sentence for discharging firearms but, as I said, perhaps I can arrange it so you'll only be fined. How much cash have you got?"

"Four hundred dollars." Kady was beside himself with delight at Rourke's attitude. "I couldn't raise another dime."

Rourke sent for a turnkey and had Kady locked up. Then he hurried to the district attorney's office and told his story.

The D.A. was sympathetic. "Tough on you, Rourke. Coming as it does now, when you're in line for a detective command. But Kady is right. We can't prosecute him for murdering Norris."

"I know that," Rourke said. "All I want is some co-operation. This is against all the ethics of legal procedure, but it has to be done. I'm going to see the judge and arrange things so that Kady will be fined every dime he owns. I want him broke flat. You can help by having the body that was buried as Nick Norris, exhumed and sent to the morgue."

"What's on your mind, Lieutenant?" the D.A. frowned.

"Plenty—about rats," Rourke grinned. "Trust me, that's all I ask."

The D.A. shrugged. "You don't want me mixed up in something slightly illegal, is that it? Very well, I'll do as you say and I'll have my assistant, who will prosecute Kady, ask for a strapping big fine. Good luck, Rourke."

IT WAS that afternoon when Kady was led into the court to the accompaniment of flashing photographer's bulbs. Already the sob sisters were playing up Kady's predicament big. His story was unusual enough to take priority over some of the war news.

Kady looked a little green around the gills when the judge delivered a stern rebuke at his actions and fined him all but a dollar and a half of the cash he had. Kady paid up, though, and walked out a free man, less than a day after he'd

committed a murder to which he freely confessed.

There was a smug smile on his face, an utter contempt for the due process of law. He'd outwitted it, done the impossible, and now he was free. A trifle suspicious, perhaps, because Lieutenant Rourke had fallen so easily. But then, he reassured himself, Rourke certainly must have felt bad over convicting him for a murder he didn't do those fifteen years ago.

Now and then Kady tried to find out if he was being followed. An hour or so of these attempts and he was sure he wasn't trailed. But Kady was a little rusty in things of that sort. He'd never been a professional crook and the tricks of the trade were lost to him.

But Lieutenant Rourke never let Kady out of his sight. He was worried too, for the slightest slip would throw the whole delicate procedure off balance. He watched Kady approach a rather swanky restaurant, study the menu posted in the window, then feel in his pocket. Kady turned sadly away and headed farther downtown where the restaurant prices were cheaper.

Rourke smiled grimly. Kady was hungry, for part of Rourke's scheme consisted of rank carelessness on the part of the lock-up attendants. They'd forgotten to feed Kady.

The killer finally patronized a one-arm joint. Rourke stayed on the other side of the street, in a tobacco store from where he could keep the restaurant under close observation. While there Rourke had time enough to phone the medical examiner and receive a detailed report on the post mortem performed on the bones which had reposed in a grave under Nick Norris's headstone.

Finally Kady emerged. He looked a bit worried. He boarded a subway train at the next station. Rourke got aboard also, barely making the train. His heart was beating like a triphammer now. If he lost Kady, for even so long as an hour, the whole plan might tumble like a house made of matchsticks.

He knew that Kady must be desperate. He couldn't have more than a dollar left, and he'd need a place to stay. Without money, he'd be worse off than if he were in prison. Kady, Rourke knew, had always possessed a liking for luxury.

After fifteen years behind grey walls and steel bars, he'd probably want it more than ever.

Kady got off the train far uptown. Rourke got off, too, and walked swiftly to a telephone booth on the station platform. There he made a pretense of using the phone so that his back was constantly presented to Kady. For the killer was more suspicious than ever now. He moved warily, with frequent stops, doubled back in his tracks and attempted, countless times, the old trick of suddenly stopping to tie his shoelace.

None of the tricks worked, for Rourke had made a high art of shadowing. Kady finally boarded a bus and Rourke had to work very fast. He let the bus roll over the crest of a hill. Then he stepped into the middle of the road, palmed his badge, and stopped the first car that came along. He convinced the driver of the necessity for trailing the bus. When it stopped to discharge Kady, some six miles farther on, Rourke told the driver to keep going.

He got out of the car a short distance down the highway and doubled back. This was a fairly bleak section, atop cliffs overlooking the river. Close by this location, Kady had fought with Norris those fifteen years ago. It almost seemed as though the man was being drawn back to the scene of the crime, but Rourke knew that it was desperation which drew him.

Kady sat down beneath a tree, put his back against the trunk, and drew out a pack of cigarettes. He began smoking them chain fashion. The first time he'd shown any signs of nervous alarm.

Rourke watched him from behind a thick shrub. The tantalizing fragrance of Kady's cigarettes was routed Rourke's way by the breeze, but he didn't dare smoke himself.

It was dusk when Kady stirred. He arose and went over to the edge of the cliff and stood there, looking down at the bleak rocks and the swirling water far below. At last he seemed to be taking definite action.

He moved briskly now, as if he wanted to get the whole thing over with. There was a large elm tree about three hundred yards from the edge of the cliff. He went straight to it, merged with the gloom beneath its heavy foliage and

stayed out of sight for five minutes while Rourke almost got a case of the jitters.

Then Kady appeared and he was measuring off paces. They took him to a large brown rock roughly northeast of the elm tree. Kady dropped to his knees and began digging with his hands. It was tough going for whatever was buried there had been tightly covered with dirt packed down for fifteen years.

At last Kady gave a grunt of relief and pulled up a steel box. He transferred its contents to his pockets, all but ran over to the edge of the cliff and threw the steel box into the river. He hiked back to the bus line then. Rourke was on his heels. Now, the detective realized, he couldn't afford to miss. Everything depended upon keeping Kady in sight.

THE bus ride was repeated. Kady subways downtown again, but got off at a different station. Rourke trailed him down the street until the detective saw a radio car. He let Kady get somewhat of a better start, hailed the patrol car and ordered the passenger patrolman out. The driver followed orders.

Soon Rourke spotted Kady walking briskly along. The radio car slid to the curb and Rourke got out.

"Hello, Kady," he said jovially. "I happened to be passing, saw you and wondered how you were getting along."

"Not too well," Kady grunted. "That judge handed me the book for shooting off the gun."

"He certainly did," Rourke said sympathetically. "Say, I owe you a great deal for not making a stew about that wrong conviction fifteen years ago, even if you did finally commit the murder. Come on home with me. The wife will be glad to see you. We'll put you up until—"

Kady shook his head and smiled. "No, Lieutenant. You'd just get yourself into a mess of trouble. After all, I am a killer and a jailbird. I'll get along. Being in prison for years toughens a man plenty."

"Well, let me loan you some money then," Rourke offered.

"Nix," Kady rejected the offer. "You've done enough for me. I'll look you up sometime, Rourke. When I get settled, that is."

"Oh, sure. Kady, I've been puzzled lately. Thinking about the crime fifteen years ago. I wonder who the man was

and I argued about, remember? He accused me of stealing the stuff and I—well, I thought he'd helped himself to it. We were both wrong, as records in your



they hauled out of the river and buried as Nick Norris."

"I wouldn't know," Kady seemed to be getting more and more nervous. "Some poor clunk who fell off the cliff or jumped off. What difference does it make? He got a swell funeral out of it."

"That's right," Rourke agreed. "Say, that clerk who worked in the jewelry store you and Norris operated—ever hear from him again?"

"Al Parker? I wouldn't have been apt to, Lieutenant. Parker stole three-quarters of our stock. That's what Norris

own police department will show."

"Al Parker is back," Rourke said softly.

"Back!" Kady cried. "But that's—incredible."

"True though. I want you to come along and identify him. There's even a remote chance that he may have some of your jewelry left."

Kady shook his head. "I think not. I want to forget the whole affair and start fresh."

Rourke chuckled and took Kady's arm. The killer blanched, swore an oath and

yanked himself free. Something in Rourke's eyes told a grim story. Kady started running. Rourke went after him but Kady, for all his years in prison, was in good shape. He reached a tenement house and darted inside. He started up the steep stairway with Rourke behind him.

Suddenly Kady turned and leaped down the steps at the detective. Rourke lost his balance, but as he fell he managed to grab one of Kady's legs and pulled the killer with him. As Kady tumbled, his pockets disgorged rings, bracelets, jeweled watches, and unset gems.

Kady got to his feet first, being less stunned by the fall. He aimed a vicious kick at the detective, missed, and connected with Rourke's shoulder. The wave of pain served to clear Rourke's spinning wits. He jerked himself convulsively out of the path of another kick, got to one knee with his hands on the floor like a runner at the starting line and then made a dive for Kady.

ROURKE took several husky punches and delivered a few himself. Rourke's were a trifle more scientifically placed and Kady was puffing badly. A solid right over the heart doubled him up in pain. The next thing he knew, handcuffs closed around his wrists.

The driver of the radio car barged in with drawn gun. Rourke turned Kady over to him, straightened his clothes and massaged a few lumps. Then he picked up the jewelry strewn over the hallway.

"This is the stuff Al Parker was supposed to have stolen," he told Kady. "I'm betting he didn't. You swiped it. Maybe Nick Norris took some himself because both of you were crooks. You meant to make Parker take the blame by killing him, but Parker guessed what it was all about and gave you a battle—there on the edge of the cliff.

"It was Parker who went overside Parker who was buried as Nick Norris. We exhumed the body. It has two breaks in the bones of the right arm. Parker suffered those in the first World War. There is a record of the injuries."

"You can't prove any of that stuff," Kady yelled. "You've got nothing on me. This is my own jewelry. It came from my store and it wasn't insured."

"Darn right it wasn't," Rourke

grinned. "The stuff is hotter than you are under the collar right now. Parker would have revealed that you and Norris were a pair of fences so Parker died. Norris had part of the stuff and figured maybe he could locate your share—so he let you take the rap for his pretended murder."

Kady gave a laugh, heavy with sarcasm.

"If I didn't think Norris was dead, why did I admit he and I fought and I believed he was killed?"

"Because you knew we'd never prove premeditation. With Al Parker, whose death benefited you, it was different. You had to say it was Norris. Maybe you even hoped he'd appear and back up your story, saying all was forgiven and he'd survived the fall from the cliff nicely. Maybe it was even all planned that way. Norris double-crossed you and you killed him for it. Makes no difference. Not now."

Kady still blustered. "You've got nothing on me. The jewels are mine. I already paid the penalty for killing Norris."

"We've got plenty on you," Rourke declared. "Witnesses proved you fought someone on the edge of the cliff. Only by your own statement did we believe it was Norris. Now we know it wasn't. Therefore it must have been Al Parker. You're under arrest for his murder, Kady."

"But that was . . . was fifteen years ago . . ." Kady said uncertainly.

"There is no statute of limitations for the crime of murder," Rourke told him cheerfully. "Furthermore, all the witnesses who saw you battling Parker are still alive. Your lie about your opponent being Norris is now brought out. The testimony you gave fifteen years ago convicts you, Kady."

"Framed," Kady muttered. "Framed because I thought you were a bonehead. I figured if I put it over on you fifteen years ago, I could do it again. That's why I called you in."

"You figured things out too closely during all those years in prison," Rourke said. "You allowed no margin for a slip and you made a bad one when I forced you into going after those gems. Take him out, Ryan. I'll come up behind, so if he makes a crazy break, I can put a bullet through him."

Bullets on the Downbeat

By Emil Petaja

Hot lead beats the jive when hep-cat gunmen swing a juke box Joe in a bump-off groove.



I'M JERRY KORKUS. I work the juke boxes. You know, those boogie-woogie bandits you hear in every two-bit bar and eat joints, blasting their insides out by the hour.

The night I'm telling you about, it was raining. Now I mean that really *wet* stuff that crawls right under your skin.

It was around ten, and I was anxious to get home to my wife and kid. I got to hand it to Maxine. She's the one what set me straight. And I mean, just in time, too. Another year and the rackets would of had me sewed up tight. Them, or else the little grey room with the bars.

Joe Makopolous's *Eats*. That's what the sign said. It was my last stop. As I tried to make a dive in real quick, with my arms loaded down with platters and tools, I crashed sideways into a big guy in a black slicker.

My pile of records skidded. I juggled around like a seal with a ball on his nose. Caught them just in time.

"Sorry, bud. Go ahead," the big guy said, stepping aside.

I ducked in. When the big guy came through the door I gave him the once over. As he flung off his poncho, I caught the gleam of a badge on his chest. Then I looked higher up and recognized that homely map.

It was Cop Otto Svenson.

"Hello, Korkus," he said, cheerfully. "I see you come up in the world."

I set my load down on the counter.

"What's it to you?" I snapped back. For a little guy I got quite a big temper. I was remembering a small episode what happened two years ago. My slightly large size ears commenced to burn. I don't spill no love on that big flatfoot.

I been playing it clean and straight,

since I did my little stretch. I don't got to kow-tow to any dumb Swede copper.

"Nothing," the big copper said easily, squatting his broad torso on a stool and nodding at the redhead behind the counter for coffee. "I yust want you to know there ain't no hard feelings."

I liked that. I sure did! *He* didn't have no hard feelings! *He* didn't...

This is how it was in a nutshell. See. The Marrino mob framed that Sikov dame's bump-off on me. You read about it in the papers. Cop Otto Svenson fell for it like a ton of bricks.

It was Maxine who convinced them my alibi was on the level, but strictly. If Svenson'd had his way, I'd be working the rock pile right now, instead of the juke boxes!

And he didn't have no hard feelings!

My thin lips curled back a little, but I didn't bother to answer him. He sat there sipping his coffee and grinning at me like one of them there Chessy cats.

"Dumb copper!" I muttered, turning to the flashy juke box in the corner.

I WENT to work. The machine really needed juicing up. And a couple of the wires were cockeyed, too. I know my stuff with machines and all that there, but right now I was in a hurry and anxious to get home.

There was another reason why I was nervous, too.

A bunch of high school punks came bouncing in from the movie around the corner. They clustered around the juke box like a drove of them there bees.

"Have you got that new number, *Jumping Jiminy Jive*, have you, huh?" a freckle-face wanted to know.

"Yeah! It's strictly in the groove!" his girl friend said, chewing a wad of gum like it was a matter of life or death.

Another punk dame, with a mess of hair like that there Vermonica Lake,

said, "You can just keep your old boogie-woogie. Give me Frankie every time. He's out of this world—I mean, simply, out!"

Guess she meant that there Frank Sumatra.

"*Jumping Jiminy Jive*," yelled the others, until I couldn't hear myself think.

"Okay, okay!" I growled. "I'll put it on that there Number 7. All you gotta do is put your nickel in Number 7. Now"—I waved my fist at them—"out of my way, all of you, so's I can get the thing running. Scram off of me, all of you!"

"Lucky Seven!" screamed the freckle-face punk, and the whole herd of them ran to the counter yelling for hamburgers and cokes.

As I messed around with the wires I felt a lot of cold chills run up and down my back, that wasn't only drops of rain off my old slouch hat.

I was remembering my pal, Rick Singer, and how he got took for a little ride—just one week ago. Singer was a juke-joe, too. In fact, he was the one what got me my job.

Now he was six feet under, with a couple of slugs through the back.

That there Marrino mob is plenty tough. Some of them monkeys would slit their own grandmother's throat for a quarter. They somehow got the idea that they invented juke boxes. Nobody else in this here man's town wasn't supposed to control any.

Not that they mind earning a dishonest buck, neither. There's dough in juke boxes. Don't never think there ain't. It was the end of my route. I had plenty nickels on me, and plenty lettuce, too.

Juke-joes don't pack a rod on their hip to play cowboys and Indians.

So while I worked I kept on glancing outside at my truck, sitting out there in the rain. I had lots of nickels stashed in the back of that, too.

Actually we're supposed to work in pairs, but my company had three boys drafted right from under them in the past month. Then, too, there was Singer's little "accident."

So I was going it alone. My little Boscoe and me. I had reasons to be nervous.

As I looked out, I thought I caught a flash of light around the back of the truck. It was the kind of flicker you make when you light a cigarette and cup your hands to keep the rain off.

I could of been wrong. Joe's joint is in a lonely part of town. The rain made it even lonelier. The street was deserted, except for an old dame with a face like a dried prune, who was nursing her evening papers under the shelter of an awning.

I guess my fingers was shaking a little when I put on the new platters.

GIVING Joe Makopolous and the red-head behind the counter the nod, I stepped up to the door, scowling and biting on my lip.

Right away the high school punks clustered around the juke box, screaming about *Jumping Jiminy Jive*. I caught a passing glimpse of Cop Otto Svenson's pan as I swung open the door in a hurry.

My right hand slapped at the bulge in my hip pocket to make sure my rod was handy, as I made a beeline through the rain, which was coming down even heavier. I climbed in behind the wheel.

I took time to light a cigarette, then started up. The motor growled a little, then gave out with the purrs, and I was on my way.

The rain muddied the windshield. I set the wiper working and whistled a juke box tune. Home sweet home was waiting for me.

Then I felt it, ice-cold, on the back of my neck. The round muzzle of a revolver.

"Keep goin', Korkus!" a hard voice behind me said. "Turn when I tell ya!"

"And no tricks, you dirty stool-pigeon!" another voice snarled. This one I knew.

It was plain what had happened. The two of them had been hanging around, waiting. They knew my route. While I was in Joe's joint, they had crawled in the back of my truck and lain there waiting for me to come back.

I sweated.

That second voice was "Murder" Millik. He was Marrino's killer—and he liked his job. He had it in for me, because of his brother. It was his brother Turtle what conked the Sivok dame over the head. I hinted that much to the cops. I recognized his work. I had to do it to clear myself. I ain't no stool-pigeon. All I wanted was to get away from Marrino and his gang, once and for all.

I got responsibilities.

"Murder" Millik saw it different. He

was going to get me for my little part in putting the hot seat under his brother. "Step it up," growled Millik. "We ain't got all night!"

I stepped on the gas. The little black truck lunged forward, faster and faster, into the wet darkness. You might say they had a good night for what they were going to do!

I edged my hand downward, cautiously.

"Keep both hands on the wheel!" the guy with the gun snapped, jabbing at my skull.

"I just wanted to wipe off the sweat," I lied to them. "It's gettin' in my eyes."

"Yeah. Well, sweat or no sweat, keep your hands on that wheel! And drive straight!"

I was already getting ideas about crashing.

But he was smart. He wasn't taking chances like that. He leaped over the seat beside me and shoved his rod in my ribs. Millik stayed in back.

I shot a look at the other guy. Now I knew him. I knew that pimply chin and those shifty pig-eyes. The guy with the gun was Stunt Herrod. Another Marri-no gunman.

So I forgot all about reaching for my handkerchief—and my little Roscoe.

Might as well take a chance, I told myself, and swung the wheel sharply. The truck lammed right toward a lamppost.

Herrod cursed a blue streak and grabbed the wheel. My idea was to try to get his gun, but Millik dove down and beat me to it. Then he smacked me over the head with his gun butt.

"That'll learn ya!" he yelled. "Lemme give it to him right now!"

"Not yet," Herrod said icily.

"Why not?" Millik pleaded. I could just see him licking his fat lips.

My head pained me like it was on fire. I groaned.

Herrod swung the truck into the mouth of a long dark alley. There was nothing but brick walls on both sides. A deserted warehouse district it was.

"Get out, Korkus!" Herrod told me, shoving me with his rod.

I knew better than to plead with those guys. They was born with lumps of ice where most people got hearts.

I shoved open the door. Slow. Then I stepped out into the sloppy alley. Slow. I wasn't anxious. I didn't want to die.

"REACH for your gun now, Korkus!" Millik gloated.

"Millik," I rasped out. "You got me all wrong! I didn't squeal on your brother! I didn't know he done it! The cops nailed him!"

A glint of light caught the barrel of Millik's rod. I could see his finger closing over the trigger. I dropped flat on my face in the mud. His bullet slapped against the brick wall.

I yanked out my rod, set it spitting wildly.

Bullets grazed my head.

I screamed. I'm not any yellower than the next guy, but I was scared sick.

They waited, holding their fire so's I wouldn't know which part of the blackness to shoot at. Then, before long, my gun was empty.

I hugged the ground, waiting for curtains.

Then guns started blasting, but for some reason I was still alive. I looked up, puzzled. Two guns were roaring, but one of the roars came from behind me!

I couldn't understand. But I was still in line of fire from both, so I crawled off to one side, on my belly.

Then I saw Herrod was slumped over the wheel, dead as a mackerel. Millik was still blazing from the back of the truck. Suddenly he shoved Herrod off the wheel and leaped to the front seat.

He started to back the truck down the alley.

One more shot cut the drizzling darkness. I heard him give a yelp of agony, and grab his shoulder. Somebody leaped out of the dark onto him. Before I could get there, Millik was wearing a pair of steel bracelets. Herrod didn't need none.

The big guy, who had showed up just in time to keep Maxine from being a widow, turned. I saw his face. I gave a yell. It was Cop Otto Svenson!

"Y-you saved my life," I stuttered, holding out my muddy paw and feeling like two plugged pesos.

"I knew you was nervous about something, Korkus. So I thought I'd take a chance and tail you. 'Specially when those kids back at Yoe's place stuck their nickels in Number 7 and got *Waltz of the Little Fairies* instead of *Yumping Yiminy Yive!* It's a wonder that a dumb Svede copper like me would even know the difference, isn't it, Korkus?"

Groomed for the Grave

By Robert S. Fenton

|| Tony Sava's partner tried so hard to be well-dressed, that ||
Tony arranged to have his shroud tailor-made, too. ||



IT WAS two o'clock in the morning. Tony Sava and Benny Scott were counting the take for the Green Table on West Fifty-second. They were in their small ornate office up-

stairs. A very pretty entertainer named Rhea Anselmo sat in a chair, smoking a cigarette in a holder. Tony looked at the dark-haired songbird with fever in his eyes, but she was looking at Scott.

"It was a good night," Benny said. "A very good night. Now if we didn't have to give out with percentages—"

The girl crushed a cigarette out, got up, and picked up her summer furs. "Smart guys don't cut in every monkey who thinks he's big, Benny. I'm tired. I'm going to get some shut-eye."

"Yeah, baby," Benny said. He got up, put an arm around her, and saw her to the door. "I'll call you about noon."

Tony filed a thumbnail, looked at the girl, then the stack of bills on the desk. He added them together. The sum total was alluring.

Benny sat down and savagely bit the end off a cigar. He looked at his wrist watch, then at Tony. Ten minutes later there was a soft knocking on the door. It was pushed open and a man came in. He wore a grey plaid double-breasted that was never handed down from a rack, a light purplish-grey soft hat and pastel tie.

Mike Kreger was the fashion plate of the high class shady set. The camel's hair topcoat he wore must have set him back nearly two C's.

"Evening, boys," Kreger said.

Benny feasted his eyes on Kreger's sartorial excellence and felt a little shabby, although his own suit had set him back a hundred and fifty. Benny had graduated

from the thirty-two buck suits class only a few months ago. He had to have someone to go by. The hat hanging on the tree in the corner of the office was a lot like Mike's. "A nice coat, Mike," Benny said. "I always admired it. If anything ever happens to you—"

"Imported," Mike said and took a comfortable chair. "Can't get 'em no more, not like this one. Okay, let's do business. Seven hundred fifty. Benny, for the week." He looked at Tony.

"Look, you've kicked it up two hundred an' fifty, Mike," Benny protested.

"You want to ruin us?" Tony bit out.

"Listen, boys," Kreger said. "Don't pay if you feel that way. But I own half the guys in your band, and that Anselmo canary might have an accident going home some night. She packs 'em in. Suit yourself."

Benny looked at Tony; Tony set his teeth tightly together and shrugged.

"Pay him," Tony said, after a short oppressive silence.

Benny stripped his take of the seven and a half C's and gave it to Kreger. He walked out with the big shot. When Scott came back in, Tony said, "What could we do?"

"I say anythin'?" Sava snapped and dropped into the chair the girl had been using. He caught the lingering fragrance of the stuff she used. It cost about eighty bucks an ounce.

"I'm seeing Kreger tomorrow night," Benny said. "I'll talk it over with him, and see if he won't ease up on us a little. Hell, the guy gets a cut in, about a hundred joints, Tony."

"He's a big man," Tony said. "I'm going home." He turned in the doorway. "You're just as tall and wide, Benny, but Kreger must be big up here." He tapped his skull and closed the door behind him.

He went over to his hotel and thought it all over. He wanted Rhea, he wanted

the Green Table all to himself, and he wanted Kreger in the morgue. There was a way to get all these things without embarrassment to himself, in spite of a smart cop like Leo Bragan. That flatfoot knew Tony Sava had once bumped off a punk named Sammy Fay, but he had never been able to prove it. Bragan would sell his soul to hang something on him.

TONY saw Benny Scott a few hours later. Benny said he and Kreger had an appointment at The Glass Key, one of Kreger's own night spots the next night. "Maybe I can do somethin' with him, Tony. He's got plenty of gravy without slugging us for that much every week."

"Good luck," Sava said sourly, certain plans revolving inside his head. He knew that Mike was over his head regarding a platinum blonde that sang three times nightly at The Glass Key, and that Kreger never left that place until she had finished her stint, about one o'clock in the morning. There was a waiter in the place who was an old pal of Tony's who could help out considerably.

"You'll need plenty of luck, Benny. No rough stuff, see? Kreger has plenty of protection in that layout."

"Forget that old stuff," Benny said. "We don't go in for that killing anymore. There's class in this racket now."

"I forgot," Tony said. There was a gun in a desk drawer in the office at the Green Table. It was an Italian 9-mm. Glisenti automatic a pal had brought back from the war and had presented it to him.

Only two men knew it was there, Tony Sava and Benny Scott. Only two men knew where to press the button under the desk top that released a spring and shot the drawer open with a bang. It was protection against a possible stickup.

Tony carried the automatic in his pocket the night Benny met Kreger at The Glass Key. The waiter there kept calling Tony on the phone. At twelve forty-five, Tony stood in a phone booth not far from the apartment house where Mike Kreger lived. He said, "Eddie, tell Benny I called and give him this message. He should go to the clubrooms as soon as he leaves Kreger. Tell him to wait there, because I might be delayed."

"Right," Ed said.

He and Benny called that little loft over on East Forty-eight the clubroom. It

was where they had made three bottles of Scotch or rye out of two; where they put labels of high class stuff on bottles of bootleg blends. They made a nice profit that way. And they saw to the cutting personally to pare down the hush money.

"Call me here when Kreger leaves, Ed."

The call came at ten past one. Tony hurried out of the drugstore and went to the apartment house where Kreger lived. The lobby was narrow and practically in darkness. Tony flattened himself against the wall, screened by a potted tropical palm. A cab stopped outside. The big man came in and walked past.

Tony took out his Italian automatic and put two neat holes in the back of the big shot's camel's hair coat. He hurried out of there, ducked around a corner, then walked leisurely along the street. Passing an ash can he ditched the gun, took off his gloves, and shoved them into his pocket.

Fifteen minutes later he went up to the office in the Green Table the back way and unlocked the door. He waited for Benny.

"He'll be burning," Tony grinned. There was no telephone in the clubrooms. "Maybe he's doing some work there and still waiting for me."

Twenty minutes later, Tony Sava heard the determined steps on the broadloom outside. Yeah, Benny was sore. The door opened. Tony checked the words that he had had ready to slide off his tongue. It was not Benny Scott, but Leo Bragan.

The big cop with the square face and close-cropped mustache said, "Hello Tony," and swung a big leg across the arm of a chair. "There's been a killing. We wouldn't have known until morning if some guy hadn't come home late to that apartment house, filled with hooch. Where's Benny?"

"Don't know for sure," Tony said. "He said he had an appointment with Kreger earlier. At The Glass Key. Haven't seen him since—"

"Oh? Did Benny carry a gun, Tony?"

"Sometimes. I kept tellin' him they were poison, Bragan. Look, I ain't sharin' no murder rap with him if he went and —wait." Tony went to the desk, slid his fingers under the edge, and pushed. A drawer snapped open, and Bragan jumped "It's gone," Tony said.

"Nice hideout for a Betsy," Bragan

said. "How many other punks here knew about that drawer and the gun?"

"Not a soul, but me and Benny," Tony said. He had to pile the works up fast before Benny barged in. Let the big punk alibi himself out of the spot. Ed the waiter would say that Scott left ahead of Kreger, and would have had time to get to that apartment house and knock the big shot off. Tony would tell Bragan about the shake-down, how Benny had threatened to get Mike Kreger.

Benny could not prove he had been over at the loft, because Benny would have made very sure that no one had seen him go in through the back door of the tacky building.

Leo Bragan said, "Then it had to be you or Benny Scott, Tony. Nobody else could have possibly used that gun?"

"They couldn't," Tony said. "We—"

"And you were here the time the murder was committed — all the time," Bragan went on, interrupting Tony every time he started to say something.

"Yeah. I had a lot of bookkeeping to do, Bragan. Help is tough to get." He wished Benny would come in and get it all over with.

"I GOT to take you downtown," Bragan said and drew his police persuader. "I'm going to book you for murder, Tony. Long time I've been waiting. Remember Sammy Fay?"

The cigarette hung loosely from Tony Sava's lips. "I—I don't get it, Bragan."

"You will—and it'll be warm, punk!" Bragan said. "You see, Tony, the guy we picked up in the lobby of that apartment house was Benny Scott!"

"Benny!" Tony Sava got to his feet and put out a hand to steady himself against the desk.

"Yeah," Bragan said. "It looks like Benny wanted to be as well-dressed as Mike Kreger. Kreger and me had a talk about that, once. Mike laughed a lot, and said Benny was his sincerest flatterer. Aped the ties he wore, the hats, and the shoes. He said Benny offered him five C's for that camel's hair once.

"Kreger finally broke down and let Benny have it—he said he would when it got a little worn. Kreger and Benny Scott were about the same build. The coat fit nice, Tony. Only the holes you put in it can't be fixed as easy as if only moths put them there. So you admit it had to be you or Benny who took the gun. And Benny being the corpse, it leaves just one—"

Tony's ears were filled with a dire rumbling sound, there was a terrible weakness in his legs, and an awful sickness in his stomach. Benny had not gone to the cutting room, but most likely had been asked to meet Kreger later at his apartment, after Mike had taken the platinum blonde home. He had heard about the plans of mice and men. They sometimes went wrong. Rats could slip up, too.

More people came in. One of them was Mike Kreger. The big shot said, "So you tried for me, you dirty skunk. I warned Benny he was doing business with a snake, and to remember Sammy Fay. You wanted all of the Green Table and that dame of Benny's. It's a good thing I gave Benny that coat." Kreger wiped his moist face with a big mauve handkerchief.

"Okay, Tony," Leo Bragan said. "Where's that gun? Once we get you under the strong lights and ask you to account for every minute between the hours of twelve and one-thirty last night, you'll have to be smart with the bookkeeping. You had Benny framed better than you figured, Tony. Framed for a slab at the morgue. If that corpse really had been Mike Kreger's, Benny would have taken the rap also and got a much hotter way out. Where is the gun?"

"Try and find it," Tony screamed. "You got to get it to pin this on me!"

"Okay. We've got a bunch of cops dry-cleaning the neighborhood within a radius of four blocks of that place," Bragan said. "You knew the gun had to be put where the cops would finally fall over it—or Benny might have skinned through. Yeah, I know we'll find it."

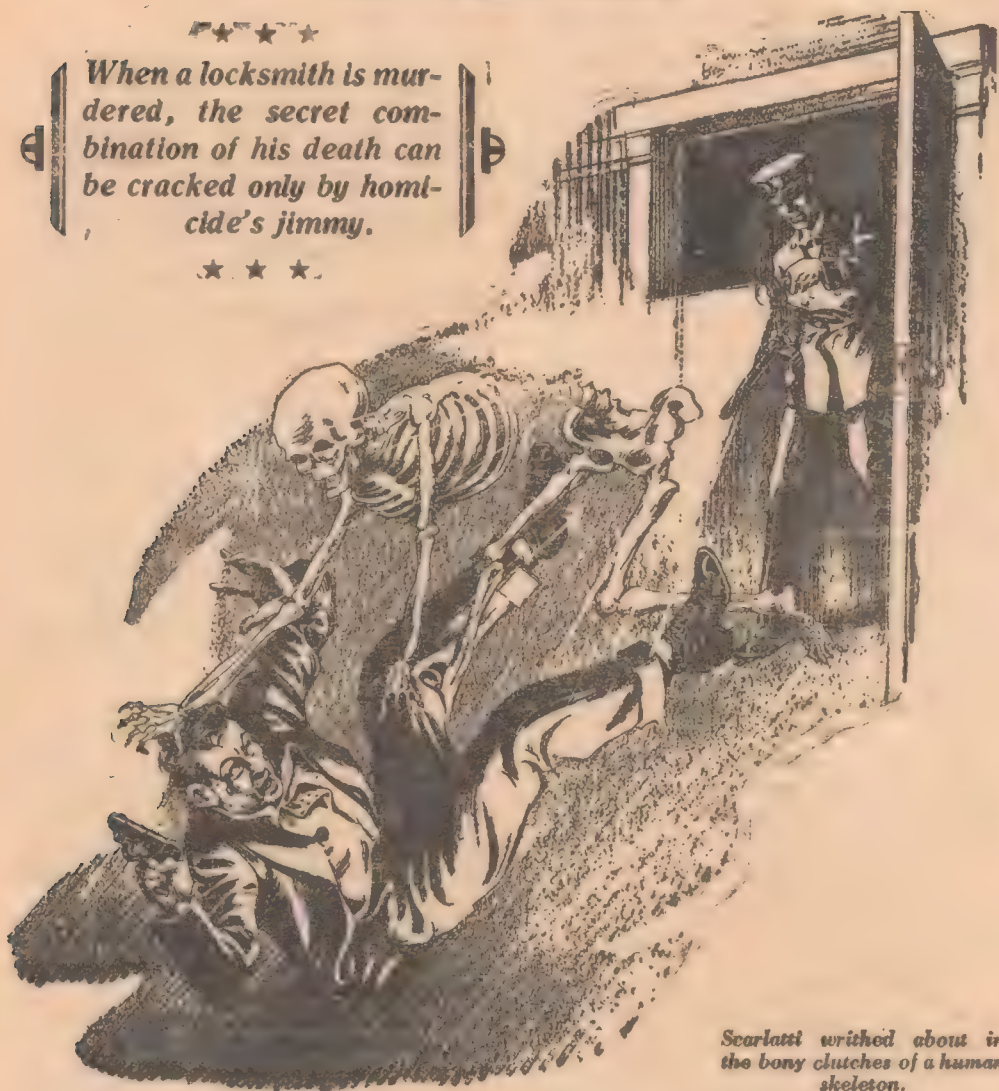


Black Dial of Death

By Fergus Truslow

★★★★★
When a locksmith is murdered, the secret combination of his death can be cracked only by homicide's jimmy.

★★★



Scarlatti writhed about in the bony clutches of a human skeleton.

FLAX kicked the gate open and walked behind the counter. There had been no answer to his entering shout. In one corner of the shop an alarm clock with broken viscera stood between the feet of a stuffed pelican, which spread its wings protectingly over an ancient Edison phonograph covered with dust.

The jumble of letters on the rain-

flecked window spelled, if read from the outside, *Henske the Fix-it Man*.

On a workbench under a dangling electric light was a litter of metal and tools. In the midst of it all a blue jet of gas from a cooking plate hissed under a pot of soup.

Flax could smell it. Home-cooked vegetable soup, with plenty of onions in it. His mouth watered.

Then he saw the feet. They stuck out from behind the workbench, toes up. A pair of feet that didn't match. One of them was a club foot in a great black leather shoe built around the lump of warped bones and flesh.

Two steps took Flax around the corner of the bench. He bent over Henske.

The old man's worn face was pallid beneath a green eyeshade. His breathing barely stirred the blood-soaked denim of his jacket.

Flax took Henske's head in his hand and turned it up toward the light. The dying man's flesh was cold as ice.

"Henskel!" snapped Flax.

The eyelids trembled. A glitter showed beneath.

"Henske! Who did it?" asked Flax sharply, trying to reach across the widening void between them.

The locksmith's pallid lips moved. He gurgled. The eyelids came up. His gray eyes looked wonderingly at the yellow-haired man bending over him.

He lifted the long forefinger of the hand that lay across his chest. "See Henry . . ." he gasped. "Dust . . ."

A FEEBLE forefinger waggled at Flax. Henske's eyeballs rolled up into his head. He choked on the scarlet arterial blood gushing from his white lips.

The heel of his normal foot beat a convulsive tattoo on the floor. The heavy club foot only rolled a little. Then both feet were still.

On the floor under the bench lay a rat-tail file with a wooden handle. It was gummy with blood.

Scattered over the floor was a layer of zinc filings. Flax stood up. More zinc filings on top of the bench—finger marks through the pile as if Henske had clutched at his work table in falling.

The soup frothed up in the pot. Flax turned off the gas. Through the rain-spattered window a white spotlight played suddenly. Flax hit the floor with a curse as it touched the wall behind the dead man's bench.

Outside he heard a woman's excited gabble.

Flax made the back door on his hands and knees. In the darkness he had to fumble with the latch for an agonizing minute that seemed like an hour, before he

got it open. Even as he swung out into the damp San Diego winter night, he heard the police crash into the front door of the shop.

He dashed across the soggy Bermuda grass in Henske's backyard and ran headlong into a chicken wire fence trying to find the alley.

A beam from a police flashlight pricked the darkness. "Hey!" bellowed the cop from the back doorstep. "Halt!"

Flax, cursing himself for a buffoon and a bungler, leaped the fence and ran for it.

A hand gun cracked. The slug breezed by his ear and thudded into a telephone pole. Flax didn't stop. He ran down the alley, doubled back through a neighboring yard and hit the street in front of Henske's shop while the police whistles shrilled in the alley behind.

He slid in behind the wheel of his battered coupe and kicked the starter. The motor coughed once and began to purr. He was half a block away before the police car roared from the curb in pursuit.

The blinding white stab of the squad car's spot danced in his rear vision mirror for a moment, but he shook it by ducking ahead of a lumbering furniture van and shuttling in and out of a maze of suburban streets.

By the time he straightened out and headed for Kandelin's hotel, he had lost the squad car for good.

He chewed the bitter cud of facts. A two grand fee and a murder rap hung on a dying locksmith's mumbled words. "See Henry. Dust," he grunted aloud. "Now what the hell does that mean?"

Flax needed that two grand the way a horse needs oats. And he didn't need a murder rap.

A six-weeks-old baby left at the door of a church. A rich girl's baby. And a brass key in the baby's basket that led straight to the bench of a dying locksmith . . .

Maybe by playing dumb he could squeeze a fact or two out of Kandelin. He was the kind of guy who handed over a fat retaining fee and then shut up like a clam, expecting you to read minds right and left.

Flax eased in to the curb at the side door of Kandelin's hotel. Before he got out he took a good look for cops. This was no time to be falling over harness men.

"THE fact remains," Kandelin purred in his rich baritone, "that my dear cousin Beatrice has abandoned her own babe on the steps of the most fashionable church in San Diego. If she deliberately had chosen to humiliate me—which she probably did—she could not have devised a better plan."

He strode up and down the sitting room of his expensive hotel suite.

Flax could hear automobile tires singing past on the wet streets below. The smell of steam-heated air mingled with the aroma of Kandelin's cigar and a faint wash of fragrance from a dozen Talisman roses on the desk.

Flax cracked his knuckles. *See Henry . . . Dust.* It wasn't much to go on. "Listen, Mr. Kandelin," he said. "I have a hunch. What if the dame, I mean Mrs. McCormick, didn't take a powder and bundle off with some guy?"

Kandelin stopped pacing, confronted Flax. He jammed both clenched fists into the pockets of his flowered silk dressing gown.

Flax was a pudgy, muscular chunk, five feet eight by three feet wide. Yellow hair bleached by the sun. Bleached out eyebrows. A red face.

He sat there in his worn blue serge with his hands on his knees, looking up into Kandelin's sallow, angry countenance.

"Listen!" snarled the rich man. "I hired you to find her and make her take the baby back. Not to squat around here defending her character!"

An infant's squall reached them through the door of the next room. A nurse in white came out and went into the kitchen of the suite.

"Maybe you better tell me," Flax said.

Kandelin shrugged impatiently. "Beatrice ran wild in her teens. She picked up with a skittish bunch from Hollywood. In those days it was fashionable to know gangsters. She got mixed up with hoodlums from Detroit."

Flax bit his lip. "Sure, Mr. Kandelin. I know. But a lot of water has gone under the bridge since then. She's married. Settled down. Her husband's in the Marines down in the South Pacific. She minds her P's and Q's or her female neighbors wouldn't give her the O.K. When the dame next door gives a woman a clean slate, believe me it's clean."

Kandelin sneered. "For a detective,

you're cunning with chivalrous feelings."

Flax stood up. "You really think the girl ran out on her husband and baby?"

The rich man's lips tightened. "As long as you keep this out of the papers, I don't care what angle you follow up," he growled, resuming his pacing. "But if she didn't run off with some sap, what did she do?"

"I don't know yet."

"What about the brass key we found in the baby's basket? Did you check all the locksmith's shops to find out which one of them made it?"

Flax eyed Kandelin steadily. "I did."

"Well?"

"Nothing definite to go on, yet."

See Henry . . . dust.

"Yet! Yet! Can't you do anything except stand around and say yet?"

A buzzer chirped. "Somebody at the door," Flax smiled. "Shall I see who it is?"

Kandelin stamped over to the door and flung it open. "Well?" he snapped at the man who stood there.

"Mr. Kandelin?" the man queried. He took off his snap brim felt. He was a pallid, Latin type, with long, delicate hands.

"Yes, I'm Kandelin. What do you want?"

"I've heard through one of the hotel employees that you want facts on a Mrs. McCormick."

"Come in," Kandelin shut the door. "All right, spill it," he told the visitor, when the latter stood in the center of the room.

"Money talks, Mr. Kandelin."

Kandelin thrust one hand into the folds of his dressing gown and delved deep. He came up with a fat wallet. Peeling off a couple of twenties he held them out to Flax.

"If you think his story is worth it," he sneered.

The man's eyes brightened. "I saw Mrs. McCormick get on the four o'clock bus for Los Angeles with a redheaded guy. Today, I mean."

Kandelin looked at Flax. "What did I tell you?"

"Is that all you have to say?" asked Flax, looking at the visitor's woolly brown suit.

"What more do you want?" the man replied sullenly.

"Here's the dough," Flax said.

He handed the man the bills and shoved him out the door.

"Well? Well?" snarled Kandelin. "What do you make of it?"

"I still say she didn't," Flax said quietly. "And with a two thousand dollar fee hanging on it, I can't afford to bet the wrong way. So long, Mr. Kandelin. I've got a job of tailing to do."

SAN DIEGO'S streets were deserted under the wet hissing lash of rain squalls that swept out of the night from the Pacific.

Not that there was much traffic near the old Traveler's Club anyway. The Club had been built in a part of the city now given over to warehouses and junkyards.

Cold trickles of rainwater fingered Flax's spine. He pulled up the sleeve of his raincoat and peered at the luminous face of his watch. Eleven, thirty-six. Time enough. The man he had tailed into the building was five minutes ahead of him. He slipped across the alley. A door on the boarded-up service wing of the shabby building let him in.

By the smell of the air, Flax knew that the place was now used as a warehouse. Dust everywhere. The odors of burlap sacking, machine oil, and pine packing cases mingled.

He shucked out of his raincoat to get rid of its rustling noise.

A light flickered dimly against the rafters of the service wing. He crept toward it. A nail head sticking out of a packing case caught in his blue serge and twanged like a harpstring.

"Reach!" the word came in a cobra's hiss. "Reach or I'll . . ."

The muzzle of a gun hung in the darkness, right under his nose.

"O.K., O.K.," Flax said easily. "I'm not making a play."

"You can say that again!" a familiar voice sneered.

The man lifted Flax's gun out of his shoulder holster deftly. "Go up there by the candle!"

Flax obeyed. "Turn around," grunted the other. "Well, well. If it isn't the big-hearted shamus who handed over forty of Kandelin's clams for a bum steer!"

"No, chum," said Flax, grinning. "I paid forty of Kandelin's clams to tail you here."

He looked around. They stood in the office of the club, an alcove set back be-

tween the service wing of the building and the main lounge.

A candle on the floor flickered in every draft of air. Looming blackly in the back wall was a huge steel vault. It was shut.

Flax faced the fat, pallid gunman grimly. "Where is she?" he demanded.

The Latin kept his belly gun steady, so Flax could look down the barrel.

"I don't mind telling you," he whispered. "Since you ain't gonna tell anybody else." He laughed nastily. "Know who I am?"

Flax shook his head.

"Scarlati. You remember, the mob that stuck up the Agua Taliente money truck a few years back."

Flax eyed the man steadily. "Wanted for the murder of Frankie Dunmier and a few other little whimsies. Right?"

Scarlati licked his lips. "That's just the frosting on the cake. Anyway, to make a long story short, as the guy says, I been hidin' out on the East Side. You know, New York."

"Let's get back to the girl, Scarlati. Where is she?"

Scarlati's eyes blazed. He grinned. "In there," he said, with a jerk of his chin toward the black door of the steel vault.

"You mean you shut her in that vault?" Flax snapped. "Don't you know she'll smother in there?"

"Slow but sure," Scarlati whispered. "She's gonna go out the hard way, like she deserves!"

He thrust the muzzle of the gun out viciously. "No, you don't! Stand still!"

Flax steadied himself. "How long's she been in that vault?"

Scarlati laughed. "What time is it now?"

"Eleven forty-five."

"Since just after dark. That's pretty near six hours. Gettin' kind of stuffy in there by now, I guess."

"Six hours!" Flax whispered. "She won't be good for much more of that, Scarlati. Why kill her?"

"She doubled on me. She crossed me up while I was hidin' out. Married another man. Now I'm gonna pay off. She's gotta find out what it means to round on me. I'll show her!"

"Wait a minute. You mean this girl had anything to do with a lug like you?"

"I liked her the first time I saw her, see? She was my type of woman. She

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went around with a classy mob of Hollywood dolls and I liked that, too. So I made it my business to see a lot of her."

"And how did she feel about it?"

"She was just a kid," Scarlatti said, tenderly. "Just a kid. She didn't know what it was all about. But that don't make any difference to me. When I like a woman, I like her, see?"

"So now you're going to prove it by murdering her, huh?"

Scarlatti spat. "She should 'a' thought about that before she doubled on me. At that I was big-hearted. I let her leave the kid on the steps of the church, didn't I?"

"Yeah, Scarlatti. You have a heart of solid gold. You even tried to throw mud on her after she was dead, with a fake tip on the redheaded guy."

The pale little ransel laughed nastily. "I knew this redheaded O.P.A. rent investigator guy had been canvassing the neighborhood and the story would click. So . . ."

"Neat," admired Flax. "Now what?"

"Pick up the stuff, tuck you away for keeps, and then back to New York. And all the way, I'll be thinking how cozy it is in that vault. That's gonna be real nice to think about, for a long time."

FLAX inched closer to the gun as Scarlatti busied himself with brag. But the mobster tossed the muzzle an inch, warningly.

"Come on, gumshoe. Down to the cellars. You can help me dig up a little stashed dough and jewelry. Get going. Down that way."

He forced Flax before him toward the service wing.

"Remember the Hotel Marina job? When all the bigs lost their ice and we hit the hotel safe for the take on a three-day holiday? This was it. We stashed it and scattered. I'm the only one left to enjoy it."

Flax pushed ahead into the dusty-smelling darkness. He bumped into a packing case and grunted. "Can't see a thing. Which way?"

He cannily backed up, easing into position for a showdown.

"Stand where ye are! Both of ye!" roared a flustered flattie voice.

A riot gun reached out of the blackness and prodded Flax just above the belt buckle. He reached heaven high.

"O.K., O.K.," he said soothingly.

"Gottim!" grunted the harness man snapping a cold steel bracelet on one of Flax's wrists and yanking the arm down.

"Got mine, too!" snapped a younger man's voice. "Flash your torch. Let's see what we've caught."

A white splash of light seared Flax's eyeballs. "It's him, all right!" said the older cop with satisfaction. "That's Flax!"

"Sure I'm Flax! Who did you think I was?"

"Ah, shut up! Who's this other guy?"

"That's a mobster. Name of Scarlatti. He played with the mob that robbed the Agua Taliente money car a few years back. And the Hotel Marino stickup. Wanted for the murder of Frankie Dummier."

"Oh boy, oh boy! Two swell pinches, Kinahan!" gloated the younger cop.

"Two! One for you and one for me!"

"It's you, Kinahan?" Flax queried.

He knew Sergeant Kinahan, twenty-five years a uniform man, had little use for dicks of any breed.

"It is," the Irish flattie growled. "And proud I am to nail down a slippery privit that needs to smell the wrong side of the bars. You're under arrest for murder!"

"What do you mean?"

"You were seen leavin' the old man's shop, Flax. Yer license plate numbers were broadcast. We been lookin' for ye all over the city of San Diego, an' we found yer car out in the alley. By the grace o' luck, it's me, James Kinahan, who put the bracelets on ye!"

"I didn't kill Henske. Scarlatti did. I tailed him here."

"He's lying!" Scarlatti snarled. "He did it! I warned him not to!"

"Shut up! The both of ye!"

"Listen, Kinahan!" Flax insisted. "The missing McCormick woman is in that vault. Scarlatti locked her in there. We've got to get her out!"

"That's a new one on me," the Irish sergeant remarked. "Take a look, Grupp."

THE younger patrolman prodded the two prisoners ahead toward the office, where the candle still guttered and flickered on the floor.

"Vault's locked, Kinahan," Grupp reported tarsely.

"And it's been that way ever since the club folded," sneered Scarlatti. "It's no use stalling, Flax. We pulled the job."

They've got us nailed to the cross. I told you not to kill him."

"Why, you . . ." choked Flax, surging up against his steel cuff links.

Scarlati laughed. "Kinahan, if you're looking for the stuff we got from Henske, it's over there in the corner."

Grupp poked around among pieces of dusty office furniture. "Here it is!" he said happily.

He spilled a brief case out on the floor beside the candle. Kinahan bent over the mess of small bills and silver. "An' ye'd kill a man for this!" he said, softly.

Flax choked on his rage. "He took that chicken feed to cloak the real reason for the kill!" he yelled. "Man, while you're wasting time, the McCormick woman is smothering in that vault! Get busy!"

"That's not much of a haul for a murder rap," Grupp, the younger patrolman, said. He scratched his head. "Who was the old bird, Kinahan?"

"Henske? He was the best locksmith in San Diego. He'd been straight for years."

"You mean there was a time when he wasn't?"

Kinahan nodded thoughtfully. "He ran with the Dunmier mob for a time. Then he took a short rap from the law that done something to his head. From thin on he went straight."

Flax looked at the black door of the vault. "Scarlati told me that the loot of the Hotel Marina job had been tucked away in that vault," he remarked.

Kinahan rose from his knees and dusted his hands. "First it's a woman, and now it's the stuff from the Marina stickup. Well, I'll just let ye tell the whole story to the D.A. tomorrow."

"Tomorrow will be too late, I tell you! She'll die in there!"

"Take a look around the desk drawers, Grupp," said Kinahan. "It may be they've left the combination somewhere when they closed. That's the usual thing."

"Racing forms," the younger man said, turning his flashlight on the dusty papers in a pigeonhole. "Phew! Place hasn't been touched in years."

Scarlati, his hands laced together by the handcuffs, leaned against the vault door, grinning with malice.

Kinahan turned the beam of his flash into the main lounge. "It was over there someplace," he remarked thoughtfully.

"What was?" asked Flax.

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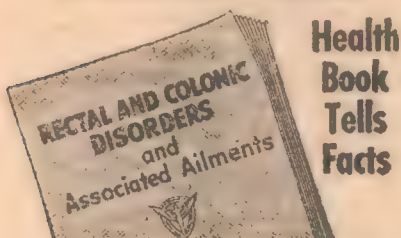


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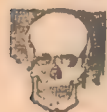
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"Henry?" queried Flax. His eyes narrowed.

"It got to be a joke all over town, so even the kids hollered it at ye on the street. If ye said 'See Hinry' it meant getting past the cloak room attendant. He was doorman for the roulette tables."

"See Henry," Flax muttered.

"Here it is!" Grupp yelled.

"Here what is?" growled Kinahan.

"The combination to the vault! On a typed paper I found in this drawer!"

"Well, thin, we'll try it," the three chevron man said. "But if ayther of these hooligans gives me a word more chatter, I'm going to shove 'em behind the bars for now and let the D.A. hear their song tomorrow."

"Let me try that combination, will you?" pleaded Flax. "I've opened plenty of these cans in my time."

"I'll bet ye have!" grinned Kinahan. He took the other cuff off his own wrist and snapped it on Flax's free hand. "There ye are. Give him the combination, Grupp. And hold the flash so he can see to work."

Flax read off the numbers, "Right to twelve four times, left to forty-five three times, right sixty twice, left to zero."

Grupp's flash threw a white glare of light on the dial. "Go to it," he said eagerly.

Flax touched the dial, gave it a spin or two. It turned smooth as butter. The knob felt slick.

In the light of the flash he looked at his fingers. Where he had touched the steel knob his hand was smudged with inky black.

FLAX jerked his steel-cuffed hands up in a sharp blow. The flashlight spun out of the patrolman's grasp. Its beam went out as it hit the floor.

Flax took two running steps and kicked the guttering candle into darkness.

"Down thim!" howled Kinahan. "There they go!"

His flash stabbed whitely into the black of the lounge, where running footsteps echoed.

A police special crashed. Flax, as he ducked into a labyrinth of crates and barrels, saw a red finger of fire leap from the gun.

Both policemen, cursing, fired blindly

at the sound of footsteps. "No use, Grupp! They've both powdered!" yelled Kinahan. "Get yer light and the riot gun there by the vault door!"

Flax crouched behind a crate and unknotted his shoelaces. He shoved the brogans into a heap of sacking.

A beam of light stabbed into his hiding place. He hugged the floor.

"Work around both sides," Kinahan's voice growled. "I'll take the other. We'll never hear the last of this if the Lootenant finds out!"

Flax slid away across the plank floor. He hit the east wall of the lounge and followed it toward the far end. From time to time he ducked as a police light came his way.

He found, unlocked the door and eased it open. The hinges creaked until his back hair stood on end. Buckshot from a riot gun, could be nasty. He wanted to be elsewhere when that blast of hot lead whiffed by.

With the door shut he felt his way across the new room. It was small, dusty smelling, cluttered with objects that puzzled him.

He dug his manacled hands into a pocket and pulled out a match. The spurt of flame brought his hair up stiffly. A human skeleton grinned at him with jaws agape. It reared up, chalky fingers dangling, in the darkness.

For a long instant his breath froze in his lungs. Then his heart resumed pounding. A coffin, a stack of spanking paddles.

The match went out, leaving a sulphurous stink in the Stygian darkness.

This must have been the Club's initiation room. That door over there. . .

He tried it. It led to the cloakroom all right. Flax didn't dare light a match in the long room. He could hear Kinahan and Grupp knocking about among boxes and bales out in the lounge. They might hit on his hiding place any second.

He fumbled from one end of the narrow cloakroom to the other without finding any clue as to where the door to the roulette room might have been.

"What's this over here?" growled Kinahan's voice. It seemed to come from the darkness at his elbow. He expected the glare of a flashlight to pick him up any instant for the blast of buckshot that would follow.

Desperately he ran down the room in his stocking feet, tugging at each of



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the coathooks in turn. He had nearly come to the end wall when a hook snapped downward under his pull.

His breath caught in his throat. A panel door swung inward. He slipped through and shut the panel. A white finger of light pried through the crack as he did so. "Nothing in the cloakroom!" Grupp yelled on the other side.

Flax pawed forward across the floor of the new room until he came to a table. He investigated with his finger tips.

A clink of metal on metal reached his ears. Handcuffs made a noise like that if you were careless.

Flax held his breath. Again it came.

"I KNOW you're there, Scarlatti!" Flax whispered into the pitch black night in the room. "But you aren't stopping me this time!"

He dug into his pocket again for a match. He rose from his knees and bent over the table top.

The matchhead flared blue. It burst into a red flower of light. A gun roared.

Flax felt the hot breeze of the slug at his ear. He held the match steady over the table top for a long three seconds.

Scarlatti blasted at Flax twice more. Bad living and his brush with Kinahan and Grupp had unnerved him. Both bullets missed.

Flax snapped the match away from him. It died, leaving the room twice as black as before. "Thanks, Scarlatti!" he jeered.

He groped over to the cloakroom door and swung it open. He could hear Kinahan and Grupp coming back down the lounge at the double, swearing as they fell over boxes and bales.

Behind him Scarlatti shrilled a string of obscenities and fired blindly toward the cloakroom.

Flax tumbled through, leaving the door open.

"This way!" he chuckled, leading Scarlatti through to the door of the initiation room.

Scarlatti scrambled after. Suddenly he screamed in an ecstasy of terror. "Madre mia!" he sobbed. "Help me!"

A dry rattle of bones mingled with his cries. From the door to the lounge a blinding stab of white light fingered the mobster.

"Great Caesar's ghost! It's got him!" gasped the Irish policeman.

Scarlatti was writhing about on the floor in the bony clutches of a human skeleton.

Grupp sprang in at Scarlatti. "Gimme that gun!" he panted. He kicked the weapon across the floor, then yanked the skeleton out of Scarlatti's arms.

"Madre mia!" whimpered the mobster, cowering and shivering.

"He's licked," Kinahan said disgustedly. "Now where's the other one, that damned Flax?"

"I'm over here by the vault, Sarge. Waiting for you," Flax called across the lounge.

Kinahan held his flash on the private detective as he advanced. His voice was agate-hard. "With yer hands high, I'm presumin'?"

The muzzle of the riot gun loomed big as a flour barrel as Flax looked down it.

"What else?" Flax said, trying to reach another inch toward the ceiling.

"Now thin," said Kinahan contendedly. "We'll try that there vault, to see what's what."

WITH Scarlatti, Flax stood back under the Irishman's gun while Grupp tinkered and twiddled with the dial.

"No use," the patrolman growled. "This combination won't work."

"Let me try mine," suggested Flax.

He stepped forward with the riot gun following his every move, and spun the dial. The tumblers clicked faintly within the massive door. He pulled back on the handle.

With a clang the steel tusks withdrew. Flax tugged at the vault door. "Light!" he gasped.

The air within the vault choked them. "Holy mither of Moses!" Kinahan yelled. "Quick, man! Drag her out of here!"

Beatrice McCormick was close to the last threshold. Her pulse had died to a thread.

Grupp held a gun on Scarlatti while Kinahan and Flax worked on her until she came around. "Who brought ye here and locked ye in?" asked the Irishman when the girl could talk.

"Scarlatti and . . . and . . ." the girl's voice broke. "Where's my baby?"

"Yer baby's all right. Who else?"

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"What do ye mean?" Kinahan asked angrily. "He helped to shut her in this devil's hole, didn't he?"

"Scarlati had enough on him to force him to come here and change the combination of the vault, so there'd be no hope of getting her out by using the old combination if anybody tumbled.

"But Henske, shrewd old bird that he was, had a hunch Scarlati might kill him before he could get back here and let her out. He slipped into the gambling room and wrote the new combination in the dust on a table in the middle of the room, where I found it."

"How did ye know where to look?" Kinahan said sharply, his frosty blue eyes suspicious.

"I saw Henske just before he died, he spoke only three words, 'See Henry . . . dust.' You yourself told me what they meant when you told about gambling here in the old days. Then I touched the dial and got this on me."

He held out his hand to show a black smudge.

"What's that?" asked Grupp.

"Locksmith's graphite. I knew then why Henske had been killed. He'd been here to change the combination. And 'See Henry' meant the gambling room, where I'd find something written in the dust.

"If you need anything more to send him to the gas chamber for fumigation," Flax suggested, "take a look at his pants legs. You'll find zinc filings stuck in the wool. I saw them when he came to Kandelin's hotel. That's why I tailed him here. You see, old Henske scattered zinc filings from his work bench as he fell."

Kinahan pursed his monkey lips. "Maybe a privit is some good, after all. Now thin, what's this business about that bony gentleman ye draped around our frightened friend? And where did Scarlati get that rod?"

"The skeleton is the property of the Club. Initiation stuff, I guess. I found it when I was looking for the cloakroom. It came in handy.

"As for the gun, Scarlati probably has half a dozen hidden out around here. And you'll find the loot from the Hotel Marina down in the cellars. Scarlati will tell you where, I'm sure. If you ask him right."

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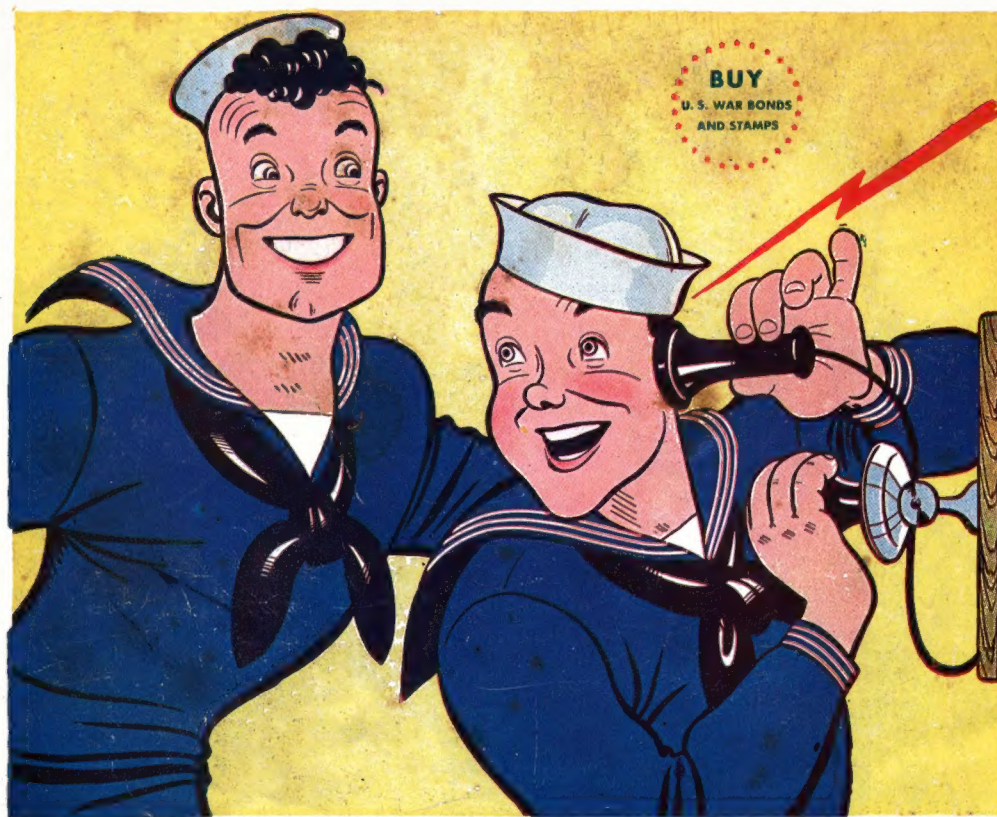


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